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IN WHOSE INTERESTS? THE POLITICS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN JORDAN

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Gender Studies

2013

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis engages with the politics of gender equality in the context of democratisation processes in the Middle East, with specific reference to an often-neglected case study, i.e. Jordan. By analysing the gender dimension of representation and political participation, my thesis contributes to the literature on gender quotas, social change and gender mainstreaming in the region, and does so from a bottom-up perspective, bringing in women's lived experiences. More specifically, I investigate how the international gender equality rhetoric is understood and translated into practice in the context of women's political empowerment. I also problematise the role of women's organisations in advocating gender justice.

Drawing on original ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Jordan between 2010 and 2011, my case study focuses on the experiences of female candidates in the parliamentary elections of November 2010, the role of local and international organisations in empowering women in politics, and the influence of the authoritarian regime on the promotion of women's rights. Analysing the intersections between diverse dynamics involved in the promotion of gender justice in Jordan, I argue that gender equality is often instrumentalised and/or treated as an add-on in local, national, regional and international policies. In addition, while analysing the reasons behind the adoption of gender quotas, I stress the need to look at the sociocultural and political context in which quotas are introduced. In the specific setting of gender justice advocacy, my research findings indicate that the association of women's rights promotion with government-related or royal-supported organisations may be problematic, especially when the role of the state is being discredited and challenged in the wake of the recent uprisings (2011 and 2012). Finally, in the context of gender equality rhetoric, I suggest that it might be more productive for practitioners and researchers to employ an intersectional approach that not only addresses women's multifaceted and diverse gender interests, but also recognises that gender-based struggles are frequently linked to neoliberalism and neocolonial policies.

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ACRONYMS

AHC	Al-Hayat Centre
AQCPS	Al-Quds Centre for Political Studies
AWO	Arab Women Organization
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CWPPP	Centre for Women in Politics and Public Policy
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
EC	European Commission
ECOSOC	The United Nations Economic and Social Council
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EMHRN	Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
ESF	Economic Support Funds
EU	European Union
FEF	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
FH	Freedom House
FNF	Friedrich Naumann Foundation
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FrF	Foundation for the Future
GAD	Gender and Development
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFJW	General Federation of Jordanian Women
GSF	Gender and Social Fund
HFWR	Human Forum for Women Rights

HRW	Human Rights Watch
IAF	Islamic Action Front
IED	Independent Electoral Commission
IOs	International Organisations
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IR	International Relations
IRI	International Republican Institute
JNCW	Jordanian National Commission for Women
JNFW	Jordanian National Forum for Women
JOD	Jordanian Dinar
JWU	Jordanian Women Union
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation
MCA	Millennium Challenge Account
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MENA IF	Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
MoPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MoSPD	Ministry of Social and Political Development
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations

RONGOs	Royal NGOs
SIGI	Sisterhood is Global Institute
SNTV	Single-Non-Transferable-Vote
UN	United Nations
UNDAW	United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRWA	The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN–WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VVGP	Vital Voices Global Partnership
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

Note on Transliteration

Transliteration of Arabic words and phrases follows the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) chart and system. The names of the people I interviewed are spelled according to their preferred English spelling. All diacritics have been omitted, except for the *hamza* and the ‘*ayn*. When I quote an author or a scholar I leave his or her own transliteration. All Arabic words, except for proper names and standard English forms, are italicised.

INTRODUCTION

To pursue any kind of social change, there is a need of a strong political will. Without that will, any idea, suggestion or strategy will remain no more than ink on paper (Randa, Amman, 8 March 2011).

Randa, a Jordanian gender expert who collaborates with several local and international organisations in the Middle East, bemoans the often-contested lack of political will on the part of the government to undertake reforms that will guarantee an amelioration of social conditions. Randa refers to a type of contestation that is still at the centre of what over the past three years have become commonly known as the ‘Arab uprisings’.¹ Although each country has its own specific socio-political and economic context, an overriding characteristic of the recent uprisings has been a popular desire to challenge what Randa calls the ‘lack of political will’ and to change the political status quo. In a historical moment when the politics, governance and policies of several Middle Eastern countries have been – and at the time of writing are still being – challenged, discredited and contested, questions of political (in)stability are more central than ever. Starting from the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in January 2011,² debates on democracy and democratisation have been embedded in

¹ After the first demonstrations started in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011, journalists in the West started to refer to this historical phenomenon as the ‘Arab Spring’. Marc Lynch (2011) coined this term in an article in *Foreign Policy*, although he came to regret it later (Lynch, 2012). The use of the terms ‘Arab’ and ‘spring’ has been problematic, although they have been widely used in Western media in particular. Regarding the former, not all the people involved in the uprisings have been ‘Arab’, but there is an ‘inclination to think of the “Arab world” as a unified entity’ (Dalacoura, 2012: 63). Regarding the term ‘spring’, Massad (2012) has contested its use because it ‘was not simply an arbitrary or even seasonal choice of nomenclature, but rather a US strategy of controlling their aims and goals’. The discussion moved on to the use of the term ‘revolution(s)’ instead, given that most people in the region, according to Khouri (2011), prefer to use the term ‘*thawra*’, which means ‘revolution’. The political semantics of the terms used, in particular with reference to revolution(s) and uprisings, have been discussed by scholars (among others, see the book edited by Haddad et al., 2012) who have tried to trace their meanings historically. During my time in Jordan I often heard the words ‘demonstration(s)’ (*muzahra*) and ‘uprisings’ (*intifadah*). In light of the ongoing debates around the use of these terms, I prefer the word ‘uprisings’ to refer to this specific historical phenomenon. In particular, given the multiplicity of political situations in the Middle East, the term ‘uprisings’ allows me to encompass diverse socio-political realities within one concept; while the term ‘revolution(s)’ may be appropriate to the Egyptian context, this is not the case for Jordan.

² The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17–18 December 2010 in Tunisia led to nationwide protests and the occupation of public spaces, and consequently to the defection of the army, the erosion of Ben Ali’s security forces and the departure of the leader himself on 14 January 2011 (Hudson, 2012:

and oriented around the socio-political events in many countries in the region,³ including Jordan.⁴

My being in the region, and in Jordan in particular, during the first months of the uprisings inevitably had an impact on my research. Having chosen Jordan as my case study country (for reasons that I will elaborate later in this introduction), I first arrived at the end of October 2010. Little did I know what was going to happen in the region in the next few months. Of course, I did not expect to have such close experience of the uprisings. I stayed in Jordan until the end of June 2011, and went back for a three-week visit in November of the same year; my feelings shifted constantly, from extreme excitement, respect and hope to sentiments linked to frustration and confusion – sentiments I intend to illustrate throughout my thesis.

What interested me the most during the events in Egypt, Tunisia, and later Jordan and the region more widely, were not only the demands for reform and change coming from people in the streets, or the questions of democracy and democratisation posed by scholars and journalists, but also the participation of women. While discussions of ‘gender and the Arab spring’ started to take place while I was in Jordan, the focus was often on the supposed paradox perceived by Western media and policy forums (Pratt, 2013): women were participating in demonstrations in large numbers, but women and women’s rights were under-represented in the emerging political institutions. As Nicola Pratt (2013) has recently pointed out, building political discourses on this supposed paradox risks homogenising women’s experiences across the region, without proper consideration of the very specific and different socio-political and cultural contexts of each country and community. Rather, in line with arguments advanced by Pratt and other scholars (Kandiyoti, 2011, 2012 and 2013; Al-Ali, 2012; Winegar, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2012; Ali-Agrama, 2012; Hafez, 2012; Lust, 2011), my interest was not limited to women’s participation in the demonstrations per se, but also extended to the gender-specific implications and consequences of the uprisings.

21). In Egypt, after 18 days of ‘massive’ protests and demonstrations in Tahrir Square in Cairo and in other Egyptian cities, President Mubarak resigned on 11 February 2011 (Hudson, 2012: 21).

³ Countries such as Yemen, Libya, Syria, and recently even Turkey.

⁴ As I will explain in greater detail throughout the thesis, demonstrations in Jordan calling for economic reform and the end of corruption actually started before January 2011. The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia during the first months of 2011 also affected people’s willingness to participate more actively in the Friday demonstrations in Jordan.

The interests and motivations behind this thesis do not only resonate with the policy debates I have been following over the past three years, or with the socio-political context in which I was living while in Jordan, but have certainly also been shaped by my previous academic and professional experience. It can be difficult to explain my academic background to people who do not know me very well. I have always believed in and loved academic research, but after five years of law school in Italy, I felt that I was not following my 'true path'. I sensed that my critical way of thinking was not being encouraged as much as I would have liked. I felt the need on the one hand to be more academically 'alive', and on the other to be more connected to lived experience. Thanks to an enriching opportunity to conduct research at the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy (CWPPP)⁵ at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, USA, I started to find the links between academia and activism that I was looking for. As a research assistant at the CWPPP, I dealt with the creation and organisation of activities for the promotion of women in politics in Iran. That particular project consisted in a leadership training programme for Iranian women organised in collaboration with Dr Fatemeh Haghighatjoo,⁶ a former member of Iranian parliament who was forced into political exile in 2004 and fled to the USA. As my friendship with Fatemeh became stronger on a personal and political level, I was soon inspired by her strength and determination to support women in Iran to gain confidence and awareness in both their private and public lives. Fatemeh's approach pushed me to investigate and interrogate her belief that women need to be educated with a gender perspective in order to promote social change once they enter politics.

Subsequently, I became increasingly enthusiastic and motivated to understand the significance of 'gendering' leadership trainings programmes like those we had organised, on both a practical and theoretical level. Most importantly, in light of the tensions between Fatemeh's background and the US context where she was living and working, I became fascinated by the relationships between different cultures, perspectives and politics in the context of the advancement of women's political participation.

⁵ The Centre is committed to advancing women's participation in public life. It was founded in 1994, (<http://www.umb.edu/cwppp> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

⁶ Dr Haghighatjoo served in the Iranian parliament from 2000 until 2004, and was the first to resign when the anti-reform Guardian Council banned more than 2000 reformist candidates from the seventh parliamentary elections. For an insightful analysis of Fatemeh's story, see Mir-Hosseini (2004).

Thus my interest in gender studies grew out of my belief in possible, if limited, social change, and out of my opportunity to analyse the intersections between diverse interests in the promotion of women's political participation – and most importantly, out of the opportunity to address and come into contact with women's experiences. Following my direct involvement with Iranian women, when I started my PhD I had originally intended to focus my research on Iran. But the timing was unfortunate. The political crisis in that country in 2009,⁷ and the difficulties of access for foreign researchers, forced me to shift my attention elsewhere.

What connects my experience at the CWPPP with my PhD in gender studies and my fieldwork in Jordan is the gendered lens through which I started to address and analyse socio-political events. Thus, recalling Randa's attention to the 'strong political will' and Fatemeh's desire to 'gender' leadership training, I ask: to what extent did questions of democratisation, reform and participation involve a gender perspective among journalists, activists, practitioners and people in the streets?

In the next section I aim to introduce my main research questions and the academic contribution I hope to make with this thesis. I will also clarify some theoretical underpinnings, which will lead me to explain my methodological position. Finally, I will reflect on my experience of fieldwork, including the methods I employed and some of the limitations and ethical issues I encountered.

Focus and significance of my research

Throughout this thesis I aim to address the continuum of demands for social change in the region by analysing the gender dimension of democratisation and participation. Specifically, I ask how and to what extent gender justice is linked to democratisation processes in Jordan, with specific reference to women's political participation. My case study focuses on the experiences of female candidates in the parliamentary elections of 9 November 2010, the role of local and international organisations in empowering 'women in politics', and the influence of the authoritarian regime on the promotion of women's rights and gender justice.⁸ By taking into consideration the

⁷ I am referring to the tumultuous rallies and protests that arose following the June 2009 presidential election, which saw the highly disputed 're-election' of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

⁸ The notion of 'women's rights' gains different meaning in different contexts and to different people (Walter, 2001). For the purposes of this thesis, when I refer to 'women's rights' I intend these to include different types of rights – civil, political, economic and social – as understood in international

intersections between the experiences of ‘women in politics’, the role of the state and the influence of the international community, I ask how and to what extent women’s and gender interests⁹ are embodied in this relationship. Most importantly, what is the role of the authoritarian state in gendering democratisation in a regional context in which the credibility of regimes is being questioned? How does international gender equality rhetoric come into play?¹⁰ Finally, how do ‘women in politics’ and women’s rights’ activists experience political participation?

As I will discuss in greater detail in chapter one, I understand democratisation as a process of ‘making democratic regimes, practices and discourses of public power’ (Rai, 2008: 59), with a focus on the actors and including women’s experiences and their perspectives. Since feminist social scientists often argue that a polity is not fully democratic if there is no adequate representation of women (Moghadam, 2003, among others), I wish to clarify that my understanding of participation does not refer exclusively to inclusion and access to ‘politics’. Instead, I link participation to the representation of specific interests (Molyneux, 1985; Beckwith, 2007a-b; Krook and Childs, 2010).

I am fascinated by the ways in which the promotion of women’s political participation involves a diverse range of interests, and my initial academic curiosity grew out of the existing literature on gender mainstreaming¹¹ (Rai, 2008; Verloo, 2001; Zaoudé and Sandler, 2001; Charlesworth, 2005; Nusair, 2009). Many scholars have written on this topic from a theoretical and abstract point of view (among others, Verloo, 2001; True, 2003; Walby, 2005; Eveline and Bacchi, 2005; Hawkesworth, 2006) and with reference to the Middle East (Nusair, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988, 1996 and 2007; Moghadam, 2005), in particular to conflict situations such as Iraq and Palestine (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a-b; Nusair, 2009; Jad, 2004). However, when it comes to Jordan there is a paucity of literature on the topic.

While my initial country of interest was Iran, I decided to switch to Jordan for a number of reasons. First, compared to other countries in the Middle East, relatively

development practices (Marshall, 1964). While analysing the specific context of Jordan I will be careful to show the intersections deriving from different lived experiences and contexts.

⁹ See chapter one for an analysis and discussion of women’s and gender interests.

¹⁰ I intend gender equality in substantive terms, trying to go beyond the legalistic rights-based approach, as I will explain throughout the thesis. Equality is distinct from gender equity, which has a narrower application with strong economic and material connotations.

¹¹ Although the definition and theoretical underpinnings of the notion of gender mainstreaming will be discussed in chapter one in great detail, here I refer to gender mainstreaming as the process that pushes for the infusion of gender perspectives into decision-making practices (Hawkesworth, 2006).

little research has been done on ‘women and gender’ in Jordan. Although scholars have written on health, labour force participation (Shukri, 1996), legal rights (Lynch, 1999; Warrick, 2009; Hussein, 2010), the experiences of young middle-class women as agents of social change (analysed through ethnographic and anthropological lenses by Droeber, 2005), honour crimes (Hussein, 2002; Nanes, 2003) political participation (Naqshabandi, 1995; Shatwi and Daghestani, 1996; David and Nanes, 2011; Dababneh, 2012) and education (Adely, 2012a), the production of academic research has been less consistent than in the cases of Egypt, Palestine, Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia.¹² Second, as I will explain throughout this thesis, while there is considerable support for women’s empowerment promoted by international and local women’s organisations, women’s political participation is relatively low in Jordan.¹³ This backdrop, together with the role of the regime, has proved to be an excellent case study for the analysis of intersections between the interconnected international, regional and local contexts in the processes of ‘gendering’ democratisation. Third, one of the positive aspects of being in Jordan at the time of the uprisings was the relative ease of participation in civil society activities (mainly regional and international conferences) that had previously been organised in other countries (Egypt, for instance) and had moved to Jordan for security reasons.

Through my research I aim to make various contributions to the academic field. First, I hope to broaden theoretical debates around gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment at an international level, by focusing on a new empirical case study of an often-neglected country. Second, I particularly aim to bring the experiences of female candidates in the 2010 parliamentary elections into the analysis. Top-down approaches have often been used to analyse issues of democratisation, gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment and participation (Larson, 2008; Eveline and Bacchi, 2005; Nusair, 2009, among others). By including the narratives of female candidates and women’s rights activists, I hope to introduce a feminist and more anthropological analysis to these processes. Third, by situating my own findings within the context of the uprisings, I hope to contribute to debates about the relevance of applying a gendered lens in the socio-political and historical analysis

¹² The literature that explores ‘gender in the Middle East’ is very broad, and includes, among others, Lazreg (1988), Abu-Lughod (1998) Alloula (1986), Kandiyoti (1988, 1991a and 1996), Ahmed (1992a), Moghadam (1999, 2002 and 2003), Singerman (1997 and 2006), Mir-Hosseini (1999), Joseph (2000a), Al-Ali (2000 and 2007) and Al-Ali and Pratt (2009a-b).

¹³ According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Jordan ranks 103th out of 190 countries, with women comprising 12.2% of the Lower House and 11.7% of the Upper House (IPU data, 2013a).

of these events. Finally, I hope that this study will have academic and political significance both for the women it is about and for the organisations that claim to work for the advancement of ‘women in politics’.

Some theoretical clarifications

Before discussing the methodology and methods used in the research, I will introduce some debates that I hope will provide a context for and clarify the theoretical framework I employ throughout the thesis. In discussions of women’s presence in the public domain, controversy can arise around the slogan ‘the personal is political’,¹⁴ which placed the gendered organisation of public and private spaces at the centre of the feminist debates in the 1960s and 1970s (Landes, 1998).¹⁵ In the 1990s Nancy Fraser (1990), criticising Habermas’s model of the bourgeois public sphere,¹⁶ observed that because of his failure to examine examples of non-liberal, non-bourgeois or competing public spheres, he ended up ‘idealising the liberal public sphere’ (61).¹⁷ In particular, she argues that although Habermas acknowledges that there are alternative public spheres, he assumes that it is possible to understand the character of the bourgeois public by looking at it in isolation from its relations with other, competing publics (Fraser, 1990: 61, footnote 9).

¹⁴ In the 1970s American feminists started to use this slogan, which has been coined by feminist activist Carol Hanisch in the anthology *Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1970), although the exact origin of the phrase is still debated (Ling Lee, 2007: 163).

¹⁵ In her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millet argued that (political) power relations are regularly enacted across a much wider spectrum of human activities and relationships than is usually perceived: political relationships occur on a daily basis in traditionally feminine spheres of activity, particularly in the domestic sphere and within nuclear families. From a different perspective, the opposition between public and private has been a feature of both liberal and conservative political arguments, which have offered different assessments of these terms (see Landes, 1998). Feminists have not felt comfortable with either of these traditions, challenging the effects of keeping the body and sexual matters hidden from view, and denying that inherited views of freedom have been applied equally to all people or aspects of persons (Landes, 1998: 2).

¹⁶ In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas (1987) describes the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ as to ‘be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour’ (27).

¹⁷ Other scholars have challenged the abstract, universal model of the official public sphere, which rests on and is constituted by a number of significant exclusions. Landes (1988) argues that the ‘key axis of exclusion’ (cited in Fraser, 1990: 59) is gender. For other critiques see Eley (1991) and Ryan (1990).

Scholars have not been unanimous in their evaluation of the public-private split, or in their approach to its study.¹⁸ In the specific context of democratisation, some scholars (Luckam and White, 1996: 222; Rai, 2008: 61), while acknowledging that the two domains are separate, argue that there is a need for the simultaneous and parallel democratisation of both the public and private spheres. Luckam and White (1996) and Rai (2008) agree that only by making the 'private public' or the 'personal political' can feminists move forward on the issue of democratisation. The bringing together of the public and private takes place in practice through the social mobilisation of women within the public sphere.

The debate on the private-public divide has highlighted the importance of the private for the public, in the sense of both the humanisation and the democratisation of the public sphere. Most importantly, the feminist discussion has helped the construction of a broader theoretical argument around democratisation, providing a measure for assessing the processes of democratisation. By contesting the normative, hegemonic model described by Habermas, feminists have shown that the line between public and private needs to be constantly renegotiated and questioned with specific reference to the historical, political and social contexts of analysis (Fraser, 1990; Landes, 1998; Ryan, 1990; Eley, 1991; Skalli, 2006).

This focusing on the public sphere requires me to introduce my understanding of 'politics' as encompassing both informal politics and the formal processes and institutions of governments and elections (Krook and Childs, 2010: 3). As some other scholars have argued (Baldez, 2002; Beckwith, 2007b), street demonstrations and grassroots and social movements are forms of political participation, no less than engagement within the state. Moreover, the notion of politics includes what Butler (1990) and Foucault (1995) define as 'any instance or manifestation of power relations', thus addressing not only 'the politics of state and the politics of social movements, but also the politics of language, the politics of exchange, and the politics

¹⁸ Criticising the concepts of liberal theory, Carole Pateman (1983) argues that 'the separation of the private and public is presented as if it applied to all individuals in the same way' (283). She goes on to criticise the liberal conception of politics, which, in locating itself within the public sphere, systematically excludes women; she argues that equality and liberty were not the only fundamental values at the basis of the social contract in the creation of the political sphere, but that fraternity was so too, and she thereby highlights the empowerment of men rather than women (Pateman, 1989). Other scholars advocate the 'humanisation' of the public arena through the values of the maternal private domain, since the former is so dominated by male practices (Elshtain, 1981). See also Phillips (1991), Dietz (1992), Mouffe (1992) and Young (1990) for further contributions to the debate.

of representation’ (cited in Krook and Childs, 2010: 4). This broad understanding of ‘politics’ is reflected in my case study. Primarily focusing on the participation of female candidates in the 2010 parliamentary elections in Jordan, I will also address the experiences, opinions and work of MPs, women’s rights’ activists, practitioners in women’s organisations, selected international institutions and state-level bodies.

Although, as discussed above, the private-public debate is integral to discussions of democratisation and participation, in this thesis I prefer to view my research questions through the lens of intersectionality: my understanding of the public sphere will be shaped by the intersections of local, national and international dynamics, as I will explain in the next section.

Methodology

[Feminists] need a home in which everyone has a room of her own,
but one in which the walls are thin enough to permit a conversation
(Tong, 1989: 7).

It has become obvious that feminism does not represent a unified project.¹⁹ I consider it to be a social and political project rooted in ‘the belief that gender relations can and should be transformed’ (Hemmings, 2010). By recognising systematic and structural inequalities based on gender, feminism finds ways of acting to challenge them. In the context of democratisation, gender mainstreaming, women’s empowerment and participation, I see feminism as linked to gender justice and social transformation (Kabeer, 2005). In particular, I take the approach not of simply ‘adding women and stirring’, but of working towards a transformative agenda (Pateman, 1989), as I will discuss in greater detail throughout the thesis. But feminism involves ‘both theory and practice’ (Letherby, 2003: 4). If on the one hand I am concerned to challenge the silences in mainstream research, as Letherby (2003) suggests, ‘both in relation to the issues studied and the ways in which study is undertaken’ (4), on the other hand my hope is to contribute, in however limited a way, to social change, addressing and

¹⁹ Although I am aware of the different ways in which feminism(s) is/are theorised and practised, it is not an aim of my research to enter these debates. For clarifications of and debates on feminism(s), see Moore (1988), Kandiyoti (1996) and Moghadam (2003), among others.

challenging inequalities. To this end, 'feminist research practice' (Kelly, 1988) is central to understanding the tensions between theory, practice, politics and research.

My methodology draws on transnational feminism. As a mode of theorising, transnational feminism attempts to trace the connections between imperialism and globalisation, as well as between the local and the global (Mohanty, 2002; Grewal and Kaplan, 2000; Brenner, 2003; Ferree and Tripp, 2006; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a; Mama, 2011). Rooted in post-colonial theory, transnational feminism shifts the focus from north-south exploitation towards the search for commonalities in the micro- and macro-politics of that exploitation (Mohanty, 2002: 503) while still recognising differences.²⁰ Transnational feminism is then both 'locally grounded' and 'globally informed' (Mama, 2011: 7),²¹ seeking to bridge the gaps between material and discursive focuses in a rebuttal of postmodernist relativism (Mohanty, 2002: 501). On the basis of the contention that neoliberal and globalising economics link all forms of oppression, Mohanty (2002) sees anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation efforts as the best site for a new transnational feminism (509). In particular, this entails going beyond the false universalism of some Western feminisms to consider the particular experiences of women at the margins of the global political economy, 'allow[ing] for a more concrete and expansive vision of universal justice' (Mohanty, 2002: 510).

At the core of transnational feminism is the concept of intersectionality (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009b: 18), which recognises that women's oppressions and struggles are constituted by a variety of structural inequalities linked to gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, education and sexuality (among others, Collins, 1989; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; hooks, 2001; Maynard, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 2007; Phoenix, 2001). As argued by Yuval-Davis (2007), a constitutive intersectional approach sees different categorical discourses not as mechanically added together in a 'multiplicity', but as mutually constituting each other. Although there are separate ontological bases to different social divisions and identity categories such as 'woman', 'black' or 'gay', there is no concrete meaning to them that is not affected by their mutual constitution. There is no meaning to the notion of women that is not ethnicised, racialised, classed, aged, sexualised, etc. (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 5). But categories such as 'gender', 'class',

²⁰ The recognition of difference does not imply cultural relativism, which reduces gender inequality to cultural differences in such a way that 'questions of power, agency, justice, and common criteria for critique and evaluation are silenced' (Mohanty, 2002: 520).

²¹ According to Mohanty (2002), these terms do not just refer to physical location, but 'exist simultaneously and constitute each other' (521).

‘ethnicity’, etc., are ‘always constructed, reproduced and resisted through intersections with one another and (...) transnationally’ (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a: 6). Thus an analysis of how gender-based struggles are linked to globalisation, neoliberalism and neocolonial policies is necessary for the study of relations within and between international, national and local institutions, as I will illustrate in my thesis.

I have employed an intersectional approach to both ethnographic research and the analysis of the transnational political sphere of activism. For this reason, when I refer to ‘women’ I do not intend them to be understood as a ‘group’: women, like men, do not constitute a homogeneous category. In particular, women in Jordan differ in terms of their nationality (‘full’ Jordanian, or of Palestinian or Iraqi origin) and religion (Muslim or Christian). Differences also derive from social class, educational and professional background, political orientation and place of residence (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a). Whenever I use the terms ‘women’ and ‘female candidates’ in this thesis I am aware that each woman has her own political, professional and educational experiences, as well as differences linked to tribal relations, ethnic origins, religion and so on. While I am careful to understand the intersections that shape the identity of each woman, I am also aware that in the context of the transnational sphere of activism, women are often depicted as a coherent group or category. As Huston (1979) has shown in her study of family units and their individual members in countries such as Egypt, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Tunisia, there is the risk of assuming that all ‘third-world’ women have the same problems and needs, and that they should therefore have the same interests and goals. The assumption that all women somehow constitute a homogeneous group reinforces Mohanty’s notion of the ‘sameness of their oppression’ (1988: 65), as well as the well-known trope of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ (Spivak, 1994: 93).

The treatment of women as a homogeneous group is a reflection of the neocolonial and neoliberal tendencies of transnational discussions. These discussions, like those that take place at national level, are often characterised by inequalities of gender, class and ethnicity, as well as by hierarchies based on linguistic and cultural competence, access to more or less privileged languages, and access to technologies (Mackie, 2001). The transnational public sphere is a gendered, raced, classed and ethnicised space, no less so than the local and national spheres. Indeed, while appealing to the protection of women’s rights, some transnational organisations, networks and

campaigns may reproduce inequalities related to colonial domination, racial hierarchy and capitalist exploitation. These are institutions that are transnational in method only, not in their beliefs; they seek to expand in terms of their own membership, networking and lobbying, but they are not necessarily rooted in post-colonial, anti-imperialist or global justice approaches (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a: 260). Politics that are transnational in both content and practice recognise the diversity of women's experiences and subjectivities, and take into consideration the intersections of all types of differences in the face of economic exploitation and imperialism.

During my work on my PhD, my academic positionality has been informed by transnational feminist politics and intersectionality. However, it was particularly during my fieldwork experience that my academic methodology intersected with my personal positionality.

Experiencing fieldwork

When we enter a field we make footprints on the land and are likely to disturb the environment. When we leave we may have mud on our shoes, pollen on our clothes. If we leave the gate open this may have serious implications for farmers and their animals (Letherby, 2003: 6).

As Letherby brilliantly notes, this image of entering a field can be applied to the experiences of a researcher conducting fieldwork. As ethnographic researchers we constantly need to be sensitive to respondents, and to the impact of our presence on their lives and in the research process (Letherby, 2003: 6). The aim of ethnographic research is to offer a holistic and rich overview of the subject under examination, considering the interviewee 'not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story' (Madison, 2005: 25). Thus the power relations between researcher and informant, as well as the issue of representation, are central to ethnographic research (Harding, 1987; Mohanty, 1988; Visweswaran, 1994; Davies, 1999).

Doing ethnographic research certainly involves 'intersubjectivity', i.e. the way the researcher and the researched community relate to each other, the relevance of the politico-cultural worlds to which each belong, and the ultimate purpose of the

research project (Sayigh, 1996: 2). Intersubjectivity intersects with subjectivity,²² particularly when a feminist approach is employed. The researcher's subjectivity is conceptualised as a constant interplay of and contestation between ontological, social, psychical, corporeal and discursive forces (Wickramasinghe, 2010: 34). I consider my research to be feminist ethnography: a self-reflexive approach to and interpretation of data, constantly shaped my positionality. Along with Wickramasinghe (2010: 38), I understand reflexivity as an epistemological-theoretical standpoint and method-practice of research that outlines and includes individuals' experiences, opinions, insecurities and emotional perspectives, in opposition to approaches that strive to be abstract, generalised, objective or definitive. In this section I will present the methods I employed during my fieldwork, together with some tensions, challenges and ethical reflections that contributed to my positionality.

The use of interviews and participant observation

Interviewing is a hallmark experience of fieldwork research (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). As Madison (2005) notes:

The beauty of this method of interviewing is in the complex realms of individual subjectivity, memory, yearnings, polemics, and hope that are unveiled and inseparable from shared and inherited expressions of communal strivings, social history, and political possibility. The interview is a window to individual subjectivity and collective belonging: *I am because we are and we are because I am* (26).

In-depth semi-structured interviews were my main research method, together with participant observation and participation in conferences, events and demonstrations. During my nine months of fieldwork I conducted around 65 interviews with a diverse range of respondents; and I was not just conducting interviews, but learning about women's lives, or aspects of their lives, from their own perspectives and within the

²² Subjectivity refers to the consciousness of the internal self (in terms of thought, emotions, experiences, beliefs, assumptions, intentions, imagination and consciousness of oneself and others), as well as to the external identities imposed by society (Wickramasinghe, 2010).

context of their lived experience, participating in their lives whenever possible (O'Reilly, 2005). My months in Jordan were an intense and sometimes very emotional time, which gave rise to conflicting feelings.

I interviewed 26 female candidates from Amman and outside, including women from Jerash, Salt, Zarqa, Irbid, Karak, Madaba, Ajloun and Tafilah.²³ The women I interviewed came from different educational backgrounds,²⁴ and their ages ranged from 32 to 67, with the majority of them being in their 40s and 50s. The majority were Muslim – only five were Christian – and the majority were involved in community work and volunteering.²⁵ Only seven had already run during municipal or parliamentary elections before 2010.²⁶ Seven had been affiliated with a party²⁷ during the 2010 election campaign; the others had all run as independents.

With female candidates and women's rights activists I engaged in informal in-depth interviews, using open-ended questions that allowed for a range of responses. Depending on my relationship with the interviewee, these interviews could become vibrant discussions between the two of us (Letherby, 2003; Madison, 2005). I usually tried to follow the general outline I had planned at the beginning of the meeting, using a semi-structured approach; however, most of the time I ended up conducting unstructured interviews, which gave women not only the space to explore ideas and be reflexive, but also the time to delve into their thoughts so as to be able to express their opinions, doubts, fears and hopes (O'Reilly, 2005: 117). Allowing them to wander away from the point at times helped me get to their personal views. However, if a woman digressed too far from the general topic of the interview, I would gently try to bring her back to it. Along with the sit-down interviews, I took every opportunity to ask questions and glean information in many circumstances, such as while sitting in a car with a woman I had already interviewed, or while eating a lunch she had cooked for me in her home, these being less formal and friendlier contexts – although I tried not to be too demanding.

²³ Jordan is divided into 12 governorates and three areas in the north, centre and south called Central, Northern and Southern Badia. I was able to interview women from nine governorates.

²⁴ Four of them had secondary-school qualifications, 15 had Bachelors degrees, three had Masters degrees, and four had PhDs.

²⁵ 22 of them were involved in some form of volunteering with women's and children's programmes in their communities.

²⁶ One of them had run for municipal elections in both 2003 and 2007; two had run in 2007 for the municipal elections; two had run in 2003 for the parliamentary elections; two had run in 2007 for the parliamentary elections.

²⁷ Six women are members of the al-Wasat Islamic Party; one woman is member of the National Party.

I learnt a lot during these interviews, about Jordan, about being a woman in politics, and about being a feminist, mother, sister, daughter and wife. The majority of the interviews consisted in one-off visits, but with two women in particular I managed to have several conversations. I went to their houses or offices, or to cafés, or they came to my place – whatever was more convenient and comfortable for them. I established interesting relationships with some of them, and with a few I also became friends. As Al-Ali (2000) points out in relation to her fieldwork with the Egyptian's women movement, 'becoming a friend was both the most pleasurable as well as problematic aspect' of her research (13). In my experience, the closer I got to the women, the more difficult it became to define the border between being a researcher and being a friend (Letherby, 2003). On a positive note, and similarly to Al-Ali's experience (2000), interviewing a friend sometimes allowed me to discuss particular problems that the interviewee would not have addressed with other colleagues or friends.

Female candidates were not the only people I interviewed. I also contacted local and international organisations (IOs) that claimed to work towards 'women's empowerment'. In particular, I focused on organisations that trained and provided activities for female candidates before the 2010 parliamentary elections. I contacted the National Democratic Institute (NDI)²⁸ and the International Republican Institute (IRI),²⁹ since they were the major international bodies providing political leadership and capacity-building training specifically for women. I managed to conduct three separate interviews at the IRI with three different practitioners, and I spoke with one practitioner at the NDI on multiple occasions. Moreover, at the NDI I participated in a workshop organised with female candidates. While in-depth and semi-structured interviews helped me to forge one-to-one relationships with my interviewees, participant observation during workshops and conferences allowed me to observe how women and practitioners related to each other in the context of a group.

Participant observation is a problematic term. As Middleton (1970) notes, the main problem with this method is trying to 'live as a human being among other human beings yet also having to act as an objective observer' (9). Finding the right balance

²⁸ According to its website, the NDI is a 'nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government', (<http://www.ndi.org/> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

²⁹ According to its website, the IRI is a 'nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advances freedom and democracy worldwide by developing political parties, civic institutions, open elections, democratic governance and the rule of law', (<http://www.iri.org/> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

between participating and observing was difficult. My aim was to use participant observation not only as a tool for collecting data, but also as a means by which to sensitise myself to the world of others through experiences and the construction of that world (O'Reilly, 2005: 106). Although I conducted more interviews than participant observation, it was interesting to note the differences between how women discussed things with their colleagues and/or trainers and how they would discuss them in one-to-one talks with me, as I will particularly outline in chapter four. I also conducted interviews with practitioners working at United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-WOMEN),³⁰ the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)³¹ and Vital Voices Global Partnership (VVGPP),³² through which I participated in a week-long workshop on women's empowerment in Amman in February 2011.

During my time in Jordan I managed to contact the country's main women's organisations and to engage in discussions with their presidents or directors and with the women's rights activists working there. As I will describe in greater detail in subsequent chapters, my experience with each of these organisations was extremely different, and in certain cases was unique. I managed quite often to visit the Jordanian Women Union (JWU)³³ and the Arab Women Organization (AWO).³⁴ I also conducted in-depth interviews at the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW),³⁵ the Jordanian National Forum for Women (JNFW)³⁶ and the General Federation of Jordanian Women (GFJW).³⁷ I did not contact women-specific organisations only, but also groups and research institutes that worked on election monitoring (such as the al-Hayat Centre in Amman³⁸), gender mainstreaming (such as

³⁰ <http://www.unwomen.org/> [accessed 9 April 2013].

³¹ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home.html> [accessed 9 April 2013].

³² The VVGPP is a 'non-governmental organization that identifies, trains and empowers emerging women leaders and social entrepreneurs around the globe', (<http://www.vitalvoices.org/> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

³³ The JWU is an independent organisation, (<http://www.jwu.itgo.com/bg.htm> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

³⁴ The AWO is an independent organisation, (<http://www.awo.org.jo/> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

³⁵ The JNCW is a semi-governmental organisation, (<http://www.women.jo/en/home.php> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

³⁶ The JNFW is a semi-governmental organisation established and headed by Princess Basma, (http://www.princessbasma.jo/index.php?page_type=pages&page_id=486 [accessed 9 April 2013]).

³⁷ The GFJW is a governmental organisation, (http://www.princessbasma.jo/index.php?page_type=pages&page_id=487 [accessed 9 April 2013]).

³⁸ The Centre is an independent, non-profit organisation, (<http://www.hayatcenter.org/> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

the Gender and Social Fund³⁹) and social science research (such as the al-Quds Centre for Political Studies⁴⁰). I also interviewed five independent women's rights activists and gender consultants working in Jordan, three male members of political parties and a former male member of parliament.

Given my interest in understanding the role and implications of state policies in gendering democratisation processes, I also attempted to interview people who were more involved with the formal institutions of the state. I had short interviews with four female MPs (lasting around 30 minutes), and I also conducted a long and insightful interview with former MP Toujan Faisal, and a stimulating interview with Senator Leila Sharaf. Finally, I managed to talk to two women working at the gender units of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and the Ministry of Social and Political Development (MoSPD), and to the head of the Quota Commission at the Ministry of the Interior.

Gaining access to my informants was less complicated than I had expected. At first I tried to establish contact with the aforementioned organisations in order to gain access both to their staff and to the women who participated in their programmes. Starting from those connections, my network enlarged through the so-called 'snowball' effect.⁴¹ Although gaining access to female candidates through organisations was a useful way to enlarge my network, I preferred to contact them through women I had already interviewed – particularly if the latter were friends with the former. In this way I felt that it was easier to establish a trusting relationship with my interviewees.

Challenges and ethical reflections

Establishing 'rapport' with my informants was one of my first priorities, and consisted in finding a 'balance between pragmatism and sensitivity in the respondent relationship' (Wickramasinghe, 2010: 165). In order to start to establish a relationship of trust, I first had to gain full, informed and meaningful consent from all research

³⁹ The GSF is a 'Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) initiative that supports Jordan's efforts to achieve equality between men and women', (<http://www.gsf-jo.org/index.asp> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

⁴⁰ The Centre is an independent research institute in Amman, (<http://www.alqudscenter.org/english/> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

⁴¹ According to Boeije (2010) an 'initial number of participants are asked for the name of others, who are subsequently approached' (40).

participants (O'Reilly, 2005: 62). To do so, I tried to be clear about the aim of my research and my background. As Madison (2005) suggests, the '*lay summary* is more for the benefit of the subjects you will be meeting. It serves to assist them in understanding who you are, what you are doing, and what their role will be in the process' (23). In line with Madison's suggestions (2005), I wanted first to explain 'who I am': a middle-class, married, white Italian woman, doing a PhD in gender studies in the UK. Second, I wanted to be clear about what I was going to research.

Reflecting on my identity, at the beginning of my fieldwork I did not realise the extent to which being Italian and married might impact upon the creation of rapport with my interviewees. When I said that I was studying at a UK university, most of my (Jordanian) informants turned up their noses; but as soon as I specified my nationality, a big smile would light up their faces. More than once I heard statements like: 'Oh we are similar, you can understand us, because you are the Arab country of Europe.'⁴² I was astonished. I had never thought of Italy in those terms, and I was not fully able to understand why they would say this. After a few months of interviews, discussions and participation in Jordanian life, I understood. The association was related neither to superficial clichés about similar cultural factors, such as the importance of the family, the community and religion in our everyday lives, nor to the relative geographical proximity of our two countries in the Mediterranean region. It was about the manner of politics. The political structures and scenes of Jordan and Italy have different historical backgrounds, and my research does not seek to engage in this kind of discussion. However, according to most of the people I talked to, the facts that in my country corruption and favouritism are continuously spreading, and that we were governed by the same man for almost 20 years (albeit with short and useless pauses), coupled with Italian citizens' apparent inability to shake off this stagnation, all led my interviewees to think that we shared similar experiences. Most importantly, they thought I could understand their situation. Those first links, together with the fact that I am married – since the majority of my informants had families and children – increased my credibility and helped to build trust. I also think that my being a woman allowed my female respondents to feel more comfortable with me, to the point that I often faced personal and intimate questions about why I do not yet have children. Since I am used to hearing these remarks from relatives and friends in

⁴² Field notes, December 2010.

Italy – where, at least in the small village I come from in the north of the country, one of the main requirements after marriage seems to be to have children – I was not particularly troubled by these questions. Indeed, I thought that opening up about my personal life might be a good way to engage with my informants. But being a woman revealed to be a bit challenging while talking to some male interviewees, as I will further illustrate in the conclusion of the thesis.

Although on a personal level I had very positive experiences with my respondents, explaining my research sometimes proved to be problematic. I found it particularly difficult to explain and engage in discussions about ‘gender studies’ and ‘gender issues’. One of the most astonishing of these pre-interview explanations took place with a female candidate from Zarqa. She did not speak very good English, and for this reason her husband, a former MP, eagerly offered to act as interpreter. Given that I knew neither the interpreter nor the informant, I felt I had to build rapport with both of them. I started to explain my background, but when he heard the word ‘gender’, he immediately stopped me and said: ‘I don’t understand why you talk about gender... I can physically see a woman... I can see a man... but I can’t see a gender’ (Zarqa, 2 February 2011). I was left open-mouthed: in his mind he needed to be able to empirically see ‘gender’ as a ‘body’. This is an extreme anecdote, but it reveals how difficult and challenging it was to be clear about my research in certain circumstances.

This anecdote brings up one of the biggest limitations I encountered during my fieldwork: language. I have a basic knowledge of Arabic, but it was not enough to conduct a full interview in Arabic by myself. I needed an interpreter. Luckily, two women I met in Jordan – Vanda, a young activist who was very enthusiastic about helping with my research, and Ahlam, one of the female candidates I interviewed – offered to help me with interpreting. Since their English was very good, and given the close relationships we had established, I felt extremely comfortable about having them as my interpreters. Most of the people I interviewed spoke English; in those cases I conducted the interview myself.⁴³ When I needed an interpreter, the rapport between my interpreter and me, and that between my informant and me, came into play, together with the relationship between informant and interpreter. Each interview was a different story, and the diverse dynamics depended on the person we were with,

⁴³ I needed an interpreter while interviewing eight female candidates.

the place we were in, our ability to concentrate and establish an intimate atmosphere, and the presence of other people such as friends, husbands, colleagues, daughters and sons. Although I did not encounter many tensions with Vanda or Ahlam, when my informants wanted to choose the interpreter, it was another story. Similarly to my trip to Zarqa, during an interview in January 2011 in Balqa, with Eman, a female candidate, I found myself in a tricky situation. Eman insisted on having her own interpreter, and although I would have preferred to have mine, I agreed. Before each interview I would ask whether I could record the discussion on an audio device. When allowed, I did so. If not, I took notes. That day, although Eman did not have a problem with being recorded, her interpreter did. That interview confirmed the importance of building a relationship not only with my interviewees, but also with the interpreters, especially when they did not already know me. During this interview, as in all interviews when I was not allowed to make a recording, I tried to take extensive notes straight afterwards. This took time. For this reason, whenever possible, I preferred not to schedule more than two interviews per day; this allowed me to take proper field notes and to think about the discussion I had just had.

The establishment of rapport is closely correlated with confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality means ensuring that what we hear goes no further than us, or is at least not attributable to anyone who can be identified (O'Reilly, 2005; Letherby, 2003; Wickramasinghe, 2010). Respecting participants' confidentiality and right to privacy can mean maintaining their anonymity. However, sometimes the researcher has to juggle between participants who wish to remain anonymous and those who desire recognition. Indeed, some participants are very unhappy when their names are not mentioned in ethnographies (Grinyer, 2002 cited in O'Reilly, 2005: 65). In this thesis I use my informants' first names in cases where they gave me their consent to do so. In the minority of cases in which the informants did not allow me to use their name, I have not done so. I have always tried to act according to my informants' wishes. However, since I have to try to cause as little pain or harm as possible and to be aware of my effects on the participants and on my data (O'Reilly, 2005), in some sensitive situations I have decided not use interviewees' names out of consideration for their personal safety, even though they may have given me permission to do so.

Consent and confidentiality are fundamental ethical issues in the conduct of research, but they are not the only ones, especially when it comes to feminist research

projects. Feminist research ethics has traditionally been concerned with the goals, processes and outcomes of research (Wickramasinghe, 2010). My research process developed over four years, during which time I was involved in different types of research. This research not only involved ethnographic fieldwork, but also consisted in library research and writing up, and in the dissemination of my findings. My responsibility to share my knowledge with my respondents, as well as my responsibility towards international and local academic communities, made me reflect on the extent to which my research will produce social change. While in Jordan, I managed to present part of my findings to some of my respondents during a seminar organised at the British Institute in Amman on 4 April 2011. I was glad that some of the women I interviewed came: they were very happy to see that their names appeared in my PowerPoint presentation and to be part of my research. During that seminar I felt I was ‘repaying’ my interviewees for what they had given me during the months of fieldwork, because I let them understand that without them my research could not have been done. But was that enough? Recalling Berreman’s (1969) frustration at the ‘lack of any human purpose in a discipline that engages in the study of humankind’ (cited in Davies, 1999: 12), what has been the effect of my research on my respondents? Most importantly, has my research been a form of feminist activism (Wickramasinghe, 2010: 23)?⁴⁴ I hope to answer these questions throughout the thesis, and to reflect on them in the conclusion.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five main chapters and a conclusion. While recalling the general aim and research questions described above, each chapter will analyse specific debates.

Chapter one involves a theoretical discussion of the gender dimension of democratisation processes, introducing the theoretical debates and concepts upon which the thesis is based. Throughout the chapter I will shed light on feminist critiques of democratisation, including debates on gender mainstreaming, the representation of women’s gender interests, and women’s participation. Although it

⁴⁴ Wickramasinghe (2010) points to the idea that research can be conceptualised as intersections/overlaps between *savoir* and *connaissances* (23).

mainly addresses theoretical debates, it will also refer to the empirical context of the Middle East.

In chapter two I will specifically focus on Jordan. I will shed light on the historical phases of liberalisation and democratisation that have occurred in the country, particularly including the role of women's organisations and the influence of the regime on the promotion of women's rights. My analysis of Jordan's socio-political context will help me to introduce more specific debates in the subsequent chapters.

In chapter three I will particularly address women's political participation in Jordan. By analysing the introduction of a gender quota system in parliament,⁴⁵ I interrogate the reasons and interests behind the adoption of measures such as quotas. Shedding light on the actors involved in the introduction of quotas, I aim to understand the extent to which gender quotas were introduced to meet women's gender interests. Drawing on the experiences and opinions of female candidates and 'women in politics', my discussion will not be limited to the analysis of the positive and negative aspects of the introduction of quotas, but will go on to understand the social, political and historical factors we need to take into consideration when analysing the impact of such measures on gender social justice. Finally, I ask whether equal representation will be enough to ensure that women's rights are included and incorporated into decision-making processes.

In chapter four I will continue the discussion of women's political participation from a different angle. By analysing the aims and agendas of selected international and local women's organisations in the training and activities they organised for female candidates before the 2010 parliamentary elections, I aim to understand how gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment translate into practice. Is the relationship between gender mainstreaming/women's empowerment and the agendas of these organisations transformative? Drawing on interviews with practitioners in the field and women's rights activists, and on my own reflections on my participation in events and conferences, I aim to understand the relationship between women's political participation and the promotion of leadership. Moreover, on the basis of interviews with female candidates who participated in the activities offered by these organisations, I ask to what extent women's gender interests are embodied in the agendas of local women's organisations and selected international institutions.

⁴⁵ A reserved-seats quota system was introduced in parliament in 2003, assigning six seats to women. In 2010 the number of reserved seats was doubled, and in 2013 it increased to 15.

The focus on women's gender interests is central to the fifth chapter of the thesis as well. In this last chapter I will pay attention to the representation of gender interests by taking into consideration how the different actors that claim to advocate women's rights intersect with and relate to each other. Starting from the campaigns of female candidates and MPs, I will shed light on the sometimes contradictory relationships between female candidates, MPs and women's organisations, in order to understand the extent to which women's gender interests are met. In this chapter I will also address more specifically the intersections between women's organisations and the regime, and how this relationship may impact upon the promotion of women's rights and gender justice in Jordan: how are women's rights perceived, understood and included in state policies?

In the conclusion I will bring together the main arguments of the thesis, linking debates about gender quotas, women's political empowerment, gender mainstreaming and the representation of women's gender interests to the context of the Arab uprisings. What is the relevance of 'gendering democratisation' in this particular historical moment? Most importantly, I aim to shed light on what the specific socio-political context of Jordan might tell us (or not) about the intersections between the interconnected national, regional and international levels in the 'gendering' of democratisation.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GENDER DIMENSION OF DEMOCRATISATION

In April 2011 I attended a one-day conference in Amman organised by the Foundation for the Future,¹ with women activists from Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Jordan. All participants were involved in the ongoing uprisings and talked about their own and their close friends' experiences in the demonstrations. The audience, which consisted of both women and men of different ages and from diverse countries in the region, became very moved during the debates, especially when the women from Yemen and Egypt talked about their past activism and their more recent demonstrations in the streets in an extremely touching and passionate way. At one point, Abla, a middle-aged Egyptian activist, explained how she had encouraged women from small villages in the south of Egypt to go out and speak up for their rights. During her talk, she posed a key question: 'Women's rights are a fundamental part of democracy, but is democracy the solution?' I heard that question spoken out loud at that event, but it was on my mind all the time while I was reading, researching and conducting interviews. As Moghadam (2011) has recently said, if democracy is to be inclusive, representative and enduring, it needs women. But how exactly is gender related to and significant for democracy and democratisation? The relationship between gender and democracy has been widely debated in the past (by, among others, Young, 1997; Joseph, 2000a; Moghadam, 2003; Kandiyoti, 2007; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a-b), and also more recently with reference to the Arab uprisings (Lust, 2011; Al-Ali, 2012; Winegar, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2012; Ali-Agrama, 2012; Hafez, 2012). However, the tensions emerging from the broader discourse on gender and democracy may take many different shapes in relation to the role of the family, the state, civil society and the international community.

Mindful of the vast literature on the topic, in this chapter I aim to problematise the discourse on democratisation with reference to the Middle East. After introducing a theoretical framework on the gender dimension of democratisation, I will then focus on the identification of women's and gender interests. In my analysis of

¹ This was a conference at which the role of women in the 2011 uprisings was particularly discussed, 14 April 2011.

democratisation, I will first discuss the extent to which gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment may become transformative in their operationalisation. I will then present the role of international donors and the international community, together with the role of women's activism in democratisation processes in the region. The chapter will conclude with an assessment of the relevance of women's participation in light of the recent uprisings in the region (2011, 2012).

Gendering democratisation: a theoretical framework

Before anyone starts talking about democracy, we really need to understand what gender means in our society. Women's rights are not automatically recognised and promoted when a country becomes a democracy. As long as the whole society does not change its attitude towards women's rights, women will continue to be exploited by the state, the international community, and society as well (Lucine, Amman, 6 June 2011).

I was sitting in the living room of Lucine, a middle-aged anthropologist whom I met during my time in Jordan, and we had ended up discussing the relevance of gender in democratisation processes, focusing particularly on the Jordanian context and the role of women's organisations. Lucine raised a fundamental critique of discussions of democracy and democratisation: to what extent does gender matter in this process? According to Moghadam (2011), democracy is a multifaceted and ongoing process that takes place not only at the level of the national polity, but also at 'different levels of social existence: in the family, in the community, at the workplace, in the economy, in civil society, and in the polity'.

The mainstream literature on democratisation, especially the body of literature that developed in the 1980s on the processes of transition to democracy (Diamond et al., 1988; O'Donnell et al., 1986), makes no mention of the gender dimension. Waylen (1994) argues that this silence on gender may be linked to the use of a narrow and restricted institutional definition of democracy, understood as 'a political system, separate and apart from the economic and social system which is joined' (Diamond et al., 1988 cited in Waylen, 1994: 332). Democracy perceived in this way risks becoming a 'political method' that serves as an institutional arrangement to generate

and legitimate leadership (Held, 1987: 164); its gender dimension is evidently sidestepped. Since gender relations are present in all types of institutions (Connell, 1987: 120), gender regimes are fundamental in democracy and democratisation as well. Here gender is understood as ‘a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes’, being ‘a primary way of signifying relationships of power’ (Scott, 1988: 42). Moreover, gender orders the processes of everyday life, and is built into the major social organisations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family and politics (Lorber, 1994) – recalling Moghadam’s definition of democracy as a multifaceted process.

With reference to the Middle East, mainstream scholars consider democratisation a process rather than an event – usually quite a lengthy one (Ottaway and Choucair-Visoso, 2008: 5), in which each country has to accommodate its own historical, political, cultural and economic transitional context (Saikal and Schnabel, 2003: 2). Some scholars have stressed the importance of structural factors in the process of democratic consolidation; these factors may include institutional reform and economic development (Tessler, 2002: 231), as well as the historical precedent in a number of polities for establishing informal and formal structures² of power (Haynes, 2001: 33). Luckham and White (1996: 221) argue that the discourse on democratisation was linked to the concepts of ‘marketisation’ and representative democracy by the political rhetoric of the 1990s.³ These approaches led to the view that democracy is favourable to the emergence of a political system that is (completely or almost completely) responsive to its citizens, allowing them to express their preferences (Dahl, 1972 cited in Ottaway and Choucair-Vizoso, 2008: 11; Haynes, 2001; Tessler, 2002; Hinnebusch, 2006; Lockard, 2005).

This debate is connected to the notion of political representation, which I will further analyse throughout the thesis. I understand political representation not only as an activity – as Pitkin suggests in *The Concept of Representation* (1967) – but also, more specifically, as a performance (Stoffel, 2008: 141). The promotion of reforms,

² Haynes (2001) considers that politically relevant structures are both formal and informal. Permanent edifices of public life – such as laws, organisations, public offices and elections – fall within the former category. The dynamics of interests and identities, domination and resistance, and compromises and accommodations fall within the latter category. The author hypothesises that only the interaction of such aspects will determine the outcome of democratic consolidation in a polity (Haynes, 2001: 29).

³ The authors refer to two different traditions in democratic theory: one emphasises a participatory model, in which citizens are more involved in the life of the public sphere, and the other stresses the representational democratic framework, i.e. liberal theory (Luckham and White, 1996).

the institution of elections and the ratification of laws, for example, can all be understood as performative acts. But to what extent do these acts represent social interests? Interests can be defined as ‘shared understanding and articulations of an individual or groups’ concern’ (Rai, 2008: 76), as I will examine in depth with reference to women’s and gender interests in the next section. Debates on the representation of interests, and on the transformative potential of performative acts such as reforms, raise questions as to whether, in relation to institutional arrangements (such as the regular holding of elections), changes and reforms are just formal steps towards democracy. A focus on responsiveness (i.e. on understanding whether elections have led to the formation of a responsive government) would make it easier to identify those reforms that might potentially affect the distribution of power in a country, leading to paradigm change (Ottaway and Choucair-Vizoso, 2008: 11). But if this may be the case with parliamentary democracies, it might be difficult to focus solely on responsiveness in a context in which patronage and clientelism occur, as I will explore in greater detail in relation to Jordan in chapter two.

This approach elaborates the ways in which democratisation might lead to social change, but it leaves its gender dimension unexplored. Democratisation processes do not affect men and women in the same way, and gender relations have changed as a result of such processes (Waylen, 1994; Moghadam, 2003). For this reason, using gender as an analytical tool may be a way to outline the extent to which gender relations and orders have been shaped, constructed and challenged in democratisation processes in Jordan. In particular, by analysing the tensions among the state, the international community and women (including parliamentary candidates and women’s rights activists) in the promotion of women’s rights, I will pay attention to the spaces in which these actors build and shape gender relations. For the purposes of this research I will use Rai’s conceptualisation of democratisation as a working definition (2008). She understands democratisation as the process of ‘making democratic regimes, practices and discourses of public power’ (2008: 59), with a focus on the spaces where actors, states and individuals act in the public political sphere, including women’s experiences and perspectives.

However, questions of women’s participation and of the representation of women’s and gender interests stem from the discussion of the role of women in democratisation processes. In this regard, feminist social scientists argue that a polity is not fully democratic if there is no adequate representation of women (Moghadam,

2003; Dahlerup, 2006; Abou-Zeid, 2006; Bozena, 2010; Krook et al., 2010). But is equal representation enough for women's rights and gender issues⁴ to be included and incorporated in decision-making processes? More importantly, how can women's and gender issues be perceived, understood and included in state policies without becoming instrumentalised? Before addressing these questions, it is important to understand what I mean when I refer to women's and gender interests, since these terms are much used and much debated among academics (Jonasdottir, 1988).

Women's and gender interests

There are debates among scholars (among others, Bourdieu, 1972; Molyneux, 1985; Jonasdottir, 1988; Moser, 1993; Rai, 2008) about the differentiation between women's interests and gender interests: the former focus on women's lives, and the latter address the structure of relations between men and women. The concept of women's interests (as well as men's interests) tends to refer to women's biological similarities, and does not necessarily relate to their gender identity. As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, in the analysis of the positions of women (and men) in society, intersectionality comes into play. Women's and men's positions within gender hierarchies are shaped by a variety of different factors such as class, ethnicity, race and gender, and women's and men's interests may be determined as much by their class or ethnicity as by their gender (Moser, 1993: 38; Wordsworth, 2007: 3). Therefore, according to Molyneux (1985), 'gender interests are those that women (or men for that matter) may develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes' (232). Both women and men have gender interests, which develop as a result of a given society's construction of gender roles and relations.

Molyneux (1985: 232–233) further conceptualises gender interests, dividing them into practical and strategic interests. Practical gender interests relate to immediate practical concerns, and are perceived as urgent necessities (e.g. clean water supplies, shelter and food). Practical gender interests seek a change in women's conditions without insisting on a change in the larger system of gender dichotomies; they do not challenge accepted norms of gender subordination. On the other hand, as Molyneux

⁴ In the context of this research the broad categories of women's and gender issues are linked to gender equality and justice, and to the ways in which gender becomes institutionalised, as I will explain throughout this and the following chapters.

(1998) argues, strategic interests imply an ‘explicit questioning of the existing gender order and of the compliance of some women with it’ (235), and reflect the ‘need to shift the paradigm of power’ (Rai, 2008: 77). Strategic interests are formulated from the analysis of women’s subordination to men. According to Molyneux (1985), these include the ‘removal of institutionalised forms of discrimination’ such as rights to own land or property, or access to credit, ‘the attainment of political equality, (...) and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women’ (233), and so forth. Strategic gender interests are often identified as ‘feminist’⁵ and transformative, as is the level of consciousness required to struggle for them effectively (Moser, 1993: 39); they also vary depending on the particular cultural and socio-political context within which they are formulated. In order to achieve strategic gender interests, top-down and bottom-up interventions need to be integrated; but the failure to fulfil them continues to be a widespread preoccupation for many (Moser, 1993), as I will discuss with specific reference to Jordanian politics in subsequent chapters.

However, practical and strategic gender interests are very much linked and connected with each other. As Wordsworth (2007: 3) argues in relation to women’s participation in parliament in Afghanistan, addressing practical gender interests might lead to an improved strategic position for women more generally. Similarly, a change in strategic legislation may have a direct impact on women’s practical gender interests. Although they are often interlinked, Wordsworth (2007: 39) found that while women’s political influence per se may have increased since their entry into parliament, women’s strategic gender interests were not strongly represented in parliament; the focus was more on practical needs. This is an argument and position that I will further problematise with reference to Jordan.

Throughout this thesis I will pay attention to the representation of women’s gender interests in parliament, during the candidacy, within local and international organisations, and in state institutions, with an emphasis on women’s potential to articulate their gender interests and challenging the useful but overly dichotomous framework introduced by Molyneux (1985). In the following sections, I will explore in greater detail the various ways in which gender has been employed in international development practices, and the extent to which this process has affected the Middle

⁵ As stated in the introduction to the thesis, for the purposes of this research I define ‘feminist’ as linked to gender justice and transformation (Kabeer, 2005).

East.

Democratisation and international development

Democratisation is frequently linked to international development practices, and gender justice and women's rights have been central to the recently prevailing international discourses on democratisation. However, if gender inequalities have been relevant to the work of development scholars (among others, Rai, 2008; Kandiyoti, 2007; Kabeer, 2004; Moghadam, 2003), for the most part this has not been the case for mainstream international relations researchers.

Women's and gender issues started to become central to development discourse in the early 1970s, when the term 'women in development' (WID) was coined and articulated by American liberal feminists (Visvanathan, 1997). Grounded in the modernisation theory⁶ of the 1950s–1970s, this concept assumed that women were not integrated into the process of development (Razavi and Miller, 1995). WID did not question the sources of women's subordination and oppression, and accepted existing social structures; women were also treated as an undifferentiated category, overlooking the influence of class, race and culture. A critique of WID led to the 'women and development' approach (WAD), which considered that women were always part of the development processes, treating them as important economic actors in their societies, and stressing attention to the private-public domain⁷ (Pateman, 1983). However, WAD failed to analyse differing modes of production of women's subordination and oppression. It also discouraged any 'strict analytical focus on the problems of women independent of those of men since both sexes are seen to be disadvantaged with oppressive global structure based on class and capital' (Kumar Bala, 2010: 2; Visvanathan, 1997).

It was then that, under the influence of socialist feminist thinking, the concept of gender was introduced into development studies. Starting from Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) dictum that 'one is not born a woman, one becomes one,' 'gender' refers to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities, not to the fact of

⁶ Modernisation theory stresses 'Western values' and targets individuals as the catalyst for social change, depicting traditional societies as authoritarian and male-dominated and modern ones as democratic and egalitarian (Visvanathan, 1997: 17). Liberal feminists tend to endorse this theory, while critiques of modernisation theory find its characterisation of 'third-world' women as distorted and detrimental (Mohanty et al., 1991).

⁷ See the introduction to the thesis for an explanation and critical analysis of the private-public debate.

being male or female in its entirety. The concept of gender refers to relationships characterised by power differences, and points to processes in which ‘hierarchies are established, reproduced and challenged’ (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a: 8). Lorber (1994) defines gender as ‘a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the family, the workplace, and the state, as well as in sexuality, language and culture’ (5). Moreover, gender not only focuses on power relations and differences, but by addressing social relations, it also highlights the intersections of race, ethnicity and class (Collins, 1999). The fact that gender constitutes a ‘pervasive ordering principle’ (Peterson, 1998: 42), which is seen to ‘shape the dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena’ (Cockburn, 1999: 3 in Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a: 8) led to a rethink of the concept of WAD. The ‘gender and development’ approach (GAD) questions the assignment of gender roles to different sexes. Rejecting the private-public dichotomy, it sees women as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance (Young, 1997). Gender also became part of the language of international development when the institutionalisation of women’s and gender interests in every sector and area of public policy started to be called ‘gender mainstreaming’.⁸

Feminist international relations (IR) scholars then started to bring gender analysis into mainstream IR scholarship and discourses, analysing women’s gender interests and experiences (Rai, 2008; Moghadam, 2003; Young, 1997; Beneria, 1997) and considering the interactions of ‘non-state, antistate and trans-state actors’ (Peterson and Runyan, 1993: 113, in Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a: 9). For instance, IR scholars began to include a gender analysis in their discussions of the process of socialisation, through which ideas and norms influence the behaviour of individuals and states, and international norms are internalised and implemented domestically (Finnemore, 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Klotz 1995). However, few researchers demonstrated the actual gendered impact that international norms might have on domestic politics (Enloe, 2000), especially with reference to gender mainstreaming.⁹ No doubt, as Risse

⁸ A theoretical discussion of gender mainstreaming is presented in the next section.

⁹ As some authors recognise (Peshkopia and Arben, 2008), the above-mentioned research on the process of socialisation is limited to a subset of international human rights norms, particularly those norms that are included in the ‘freedom from’ rights (freedom from torture, from detention without trial, from disappearance, etc.), leaving unexplained the proliferation within democratising countries of norms not included in the ‘freedom from’ group. Furthermore, despite their wide applicability, these models focus only on cases in which norm proliferation affects regime change, and do not explain the

et al. (1999) point out, international norms and principles ‘do not float freely’ (4), but affect domestic institutional change in a differential manner, through the establishment and sustainability of networks among domestic and transnational actors.¹⁰ But how do international norms affect gender power relations in domestic institutions with reference to gender mainstreaming policies? This question is central to my entire analysis, with reference both to the role of the Jordanian state in promoting gender justice at the national level, and to the role of the international community in pursuing democratisation efforts. But before this analysis can take shape in the subsequent chapters of the thesis, it is important to understand what gender mainstreaming means.

Gender mainstreaming

Thanks to women’s movements and women activists worldwide, issues such as the incorporation of gender within existing institutions, the creation of new institutions ad hoc, and the parallel use of both strategies have become central to political and academic contexts. The push to integrate gender and women’s issues into the structures of national and international institutions gained real prominence during the World Conference on International Women’s Year, held in Mexico City between 19 June and 2 July 1975. This was the first world conference on the status of women, and it highlighted the continuous and pervasive nature of discrimination against women.

international proliferation of norms that do not bring any such change but simply improve the human rights conditions in the country. This critique of the constructivist approach to socialisation claims that socialisation requires all the pieces of the relevant social structure – including not only the norms themselves, but also a range of international institutions to oversee compliance with them, and advocacy networks to monitor norm compliance and norm-breaking – to be in place for the process to be effective.

¹⁰ A brand new strand of scholarship (Checkel, 2005), post-functionalism, has made serious efforts to show how international organisations socialise states and agents with international norms, bringing domestic politics back in, including political opposition by domestic actors. One of the weaknesses of post-functionalism is its view that the agents who are the target of socialisation include only individual policymakers and institutions, excluding the wider interests of society. Michelutti (2007) argues that because of the focus on ‘institutional factors’, rather than on ‘the practices and ideas of local people’ which locally legitimise (or do not legitimise) democracy and the practices associated with it, the ways in which the values and practices of democracy become embedded in particular cultural and social practices and entrenched in the consciousness of ordinary people have not been deeply taken into consideration by scholars. This is what she calls ‘the process of vernacularisation of democratic politics’ (Michelutti, 2007: 639). The vernacularisation process has been one of the main focuses of critique of the socialisation argument, especially in relation to gender studies, understood by Merry (2006) as the process that captures the important role played by local agents in making international human rights laws and ideas applicable in specific local contexts in order to challenging gender violence.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985), which followed this conference and included two more World Conferences (Copenhagen 1980¹¹ and Nairobi 1985¹²), brought further attention to the issue. From the second half of the 1970s, international funders began to promote the integration of women into development. The Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) produced the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA),¹³ a ‘visionary roadmap on the path to gender equality’ (Zaoudé and Sandler, 2001: 26). In the 1990s, feminists working within the European Commission (EC) developed the concept of ‘gender mainstreaming’ in an effort to promote gender equality policies among member states; gender mainstreaming was then included in the Platform for Action. This consensus document placed gender equality and the advancement of women on the global policymaking agenda.

The main assumption of gender mainstreaming is that gender perspectives are essential to policymaking programmes (West, 1999). As a strategy for social change, gender mainstreaming requires that all ‘decision-making processes take gender into account’ (Hawkesworth, 2006: 96), investigating the gender impacts, outcomes and implications of proposed policies and programmes on men and women. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) developed a definition in which the main goal was to achieve equality between men and women, infusing gender considerations into organisational processes. The United Nations defined gender mainstreaming as:

(...) the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy of making women’s as well men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (ECOSOC, 1997).

¹¹ World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Quality, Development and Peace, 14–30 July 1980.

¹² World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Quality, Development and Peace, 15–26 July 1985.

¹³ Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, September 1995.

This definition strengthens the integration of women and men's concerns into the outputs, policies and programmes of organisations. Rai (2008) agrees with this definition, and further conceptualises gender mainstreaming as a 'process of gender democratisation, including women and their own perception of their political interests and political projects into the policy-making processes' (72). Agreeing with Rai's definition as it connects with democratisation processes, I also adhere to the 'transformative' approach proposed by Squires¹⁴ (1999) and developed by others (Woodward, 2003; Verloo, 2005). As a strategy, gender mainstreaming is transformative because it 'claims to address and redress the genderedness of systems and processes' (Verloo, 2005: 347). Through the transformative agenda, dialogues between diverse social groups are emphasised, and the experiences, knowledge and interests of women and men are made central to development and democratisation practices (Staudt, 1998; Herbert, 2007; Squires, 2005). Moreover, in order to be fully transformative, there is a need to include a strategy for empowerment by creating space for non-hegemonic actors to promote gender equality (Verloo 2005).

The institutionalisation of women and gender interests at the national level has been a concern of both women's movements and international organisations. Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a strategy for distributing women's gender needs and interests across state, local and international institutions. The institutional mechanisms for enhancing gender mainstreaming agendas are found in the 'national machineries'. National machineries, also known as women's policy agencies, were defined after the First World Conference as instruments for advancing women's interests. They were specifically addressed by the BPFA, which defined them as 'the central policy coordinating unit inside the government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas' (UN-WOMEN Platform for Action, 1995: para. 201). The UN saw national machineries as 'catalysts' for promoting gender equality and justice (UNHCR, 2000: 10). This definition sounds like a precept, acceptable only at a theoretical level. It is important to verify how women's policy machineries deal in practice with women's interests, and what the

¹⁴ In her analysis of gender and political theory, Squires (1999) distinguishes between three different strategies: the strategy of inclusion, based on the principle of equality; the strategy of reversal, based on the principle of difference; and the strategy of displacement, based on the principle of diversity. The latter two strategies are considered transformative. See Squires (1999) and Verloo (2005) for an in-depth analysis.

impact is on state policies.

Although many countries established women's policy offices during the UN Decade for Women, most of these offices remained on the margins of decision-making processes at national and international levels. They 'lacked resources, authority and expertise to achieve their objectives' (Stienstra, 1994: 95). By 1990, 100 nations had established national machineries for the advancement of women. By 2004, at least 165 countries had created some form of national machinery (UNDAW, 2005: 5); these included ministries of women's affairs, and women's units within ministries of health, education and employment. Although many nations established women's machineries, the limited number of instruments with which these units were actually provided made the fulfilment of their broad mandates incredibly difficult. In the MENA region, as well as in other parts of the world, some countries created gender sections, units within ministries or national institutions (Derichs, 2010), such as the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Elderly Affairs in Tunisia (McBride and Mazur, 2011), the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Afghanistan (Larson, 2008), or the Women Unit in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in Palestine (Nusair, 2009).

In such a context, it is important to understand how the gaps are being filled. Which women are capable of representing gender interests? Is it enough to be a woman in order to represent gender interests? As I will show in relation to Jordan throughout this thesis, a detailed analysis of the historical and social context is necessary in order to challenge the ways these gaps are filled.

Women's empowerment and women's leadership

Women's empowerment is inherent to the concept of gender mainstreaming. As empowerment is a term that is often misused and a concept that is often misunderstood, I will sketch a brief background. The concept of empowerment was developed during the 1970s; it was predominantly used to understand 'third-world' development issues (Panda, 2002). 'Empowerment' focused particularly on the facilitation of struggles for social justice and equality by changing social, economic and political structures at all levels, and ensuring the participation of women in decision-making processes. Antrobus (1989) defines empowerment as a 'process to enable a powerless woman to develop autonomy, self control and confidence with a

group of women and men, a sense of collective influence over oppressive social conditions' (188). Writing on poor urban and rural women in India, Batliwala (1994) talks about inner and outer power. Empowerment is about both what is within you and what is not, in multiple relationships with others, and it begins when women not only recognise social oppression, but also act to change existing power relations (Batliwala, 1994). She also argues that while change on the individual level is crucial to becoming aware of the sources of oppression, 'such radical changes are not sustainable if limited to a few individual women, because traditional power structures will seek to isolate and ostracize them' (Batliwala, 1994: 132). Kabeer (2004) adds to this that empowerment necessitates the development of a collective project built on collective solidarity in the public arena, underlining the important role of women's organisations and social movements. Rowlands (1995) goes further, pointing out that women need to set out their own agendas; she also agrees that individual empowerment is a relevant step, but that it is not enough by itself. The collectiveness and the sharing of the same agendas leads to stronger and more powerful movements; however, the main goal should remain the ability of the individual woman to take control of her life (Sen and Batliwala, 2000: 20).

According to Kabeer (2004 and 2005), the concept of empowerment is closely linked to the notion of disempowerment, which can be defined as a situation in which the ability to make choices is denied. Hence empowerment refers to the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them: according to Kabeer's understanding of the concept, empowerment entails change (Kabeer, 2005: 14). Lazo (1995) also considers empowerment a process, an instrument to equip women with the capabilities to gain control over resources. Stromquist (1995) defines empowerment as a socio-political concept that goes beyond formal political participation and consciousness-raising. The concept of empowerment encompasses four different dimensions: the cognitive,¹⁵ the political, the economic and the psychological. Monkman (1997 quoted in Panda, 2002: 3) adds a fifth dimension, the physical,¹⁶ to this conceptualisation. Mayoux (1998), who focuses on issues of poverty, considers empowerment to be the expansion of the individual's life choices and capacities for self-reliance, and outlines

¹⁵ The cognitive dimension involves the understanding of the causes of subordination.

¹⁶ The physical dimension involves having control over one's body and the ability to protect oneself from sexual violence.

its four dimensions as: 'power within', which refers to changes in confidence and consciousness; 'power to', which implies an increase in skills and abilities, including the earning of income and access to markets and networks; 'power over', which refers to changes in power relations within households, in communities and at the level of institutions; and 'power with', which implies the organisation of the powerless to enhance individual abilities and challenge power relations. While all of these conceptualisations of power have political implications, 'power over' and 'power with' have the most, because 'power over' involves a direct and open contestation of the status quo, while 'power with', focusing on collective mobilisation in order to induce change, also involves a 'direct challenge to the existing hierarchies of power' (Tadros, 2010: 227).

As explained above, and as I will analyse in the next sections, international institutions and national states play an important role in terms of women's empowerment. In order to 'gender' their policies, international institutions and states create the conditions and provide the instruments and access to resources so that women can exercise their autonomy and self-empowerment as a process. States and institutions are instrumental to reconstituting the position of women on an equal basis in all spheres of social and state activity (Panda, 2002). The extent to which the Jordanian state and institutions empower women is the focus of my research.

The concept of empowerment, like that of gender mainstreaming, has a transformative aspect; therefore, following Kabeer's argument (2004), the emphasis should shift from 'access to' and 'participation in' to 'ideas of contestation and struggle in which alliances can be formed with different groups, including men in specific times and places for purposes of transforming institutions of the state, the economy, the community and the family' (53) in order to achieve gender equality. Failure to implement the stated objectives may derail the intended social transformation. Throughout the thesis, I will interrogate the aims and agendas of empowerment and gender mainstreaming projects in Jordan in order to discover whether practitioners have taken into consideration the transformative aspects of both.

The 1995 BPFA included political empowerment, understood as women's equal power in political decision-making and their consequent access to power. I consider politics in an inclusive way, as encompassing power relations that operate at all levels of society: from the most personal family relations to the most public – i.e. governmental or international – levels, addressing basic needs and issues such as

employment, education, healthcare and violence against women. According to the BPFA, women's political empowerment is premised on three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: equality between men and women, women's rights to the development of their full potential, and women's rights to self-representation and self-determination (UN-WOMEN Platform for Action, 1995). Whether countries' constitutions guarantee these principles may need further analysis; whereas constitutions provide these principles, there might be a large gap between constitutional provision and actual practice.

The contradiction between perception and practice raises several issues, particularly with reference to gender stereotyping in leadership positions. Historically, ideas of leadership have rested on notions of masculinity and women leaders are often regarded as an afterthought (Kiamba, 2006). Social conventions on gender and leadership have often excluded women, and senior leadership is seen as a masculine domain. In the political context, a leader is a person who rules, guides or inspires others; someone who is endowed with formal or informal authority by others, regardless of the values they represent. Abdela (2000) adds that a leader is a person who also has the 'ability to mobilise others' (16). She believes that, in a democratic environment, leaders are expected to respond to the influence of their followers, as well as to exert influence over them. Rost (1991) adds the idea of transformation to the concept of leadership: 'real transformation involves active people, engaging in influence relationships based on persuasion intending real changes to happen, and insisting that those changes reflect their mutual purposes' (123). Although women's sphere of activity has often been confined to the domestic, private world – where they are considered to be secondary earners, and therefore not even leaders within the family – women in the Middle East have demonstrated that they can be active agents for change, not only within the family, but also within civil society, and to a certain extent in national institutions. Before turning to the context of the Middle East, I will conclude with some reflections on the relationships between democratisation, neoliberalism and gender mainstreaming.

How does neoliberalism come into play?

As previously discussed, the integration of gender issues into both international and national institutions is a step towards the promotion and advancement of gender

equality, at least in theory. Some feminists have argued that the presence of gender equality policies within the international system is necessary in order to achieve gender equality and to have a positive impact on the lives of women, an idea that is challenged within the UN system itself (Zaoudé and Sandler, 2001). In this regard, Zaoudé and Sandler (2001: 30) underline three changes that affect institutions. First, they emphasise that gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are complementary strategies for achieving gender equality, pursued by the state and the international community. Second, they highlight the use of existing human rights machineries to promote equality and change institutions. Third, they underline the relevance of the growing cooperation among a critical mass of women, both inside and outside development institutions, who share the goal of moving the gender equality agenda forward. Zaoudé and Sandler (2001) are merely outlining the first step towards turning gender mainstreaming into a transformative agenda. There are two major factors that shape and constrain efforts to mainstream gender and empower women in global policymaking: the gap between feminist theory and institutional practice, and the conflict between feminist concepts and values and the broader ideological framework of neoliberal economics.

Neoliberalism refers to the policies and processes of the 'political economic paradigm of our time' (McChesney, 1999: 7); a central premise of this discourse is the equation of improved human well-being with wealth accumulation (Keddie, 2010: 139). While in theory neoliberalism might be seen as a utopian project in its aim to revitalise the global economy, in practice it has established the conditions for the restoration of power to economic elites (Harvey, 2005; O'Connell, 2007). Although producing new prosperity and growth for a variety of sectors and regions, its predominant impact has been the generation of growing inequalities, both within and between countries, and the intensification of the inequitable distribution of resources and power along racialised, gendered and classed lines (Eisenstein, 1998; Mohanty, 2003, Keddie, 2010: 140). Neoliberalism does not operate uniquely in relation to economic forces; by suppressing non-market forces, it also acts as a political and cultural system (McChesney, 1999: 9). Moreover, neoliberalism does not stop at the implementation of economic policies, but also has a deep impact on people's subjectivities and 'modes of thought'. Although subjectivities are central to my research, I am also interested in analysing the extent to which 'agents' of neoliberalism, namely states, institutions and organisations, shape and construct

gender hierarchies and relations in line with neoliberal policies. The ways in which neoliberalism has deepened the impoverishment and marginalisation of women – especially women who are already oppressed by circumstances of poverty and race – are well documented (Eisenstein, 1998; Blackmore, 2000; Jaggar, 2002; Mohanty, 2003). By analysing the interactions and intersections among and between the different actors in the process of ‘gendering’ democratisation, I hope to further contribute to this debate, particularly with reference to gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment.

In line with neoliberal agendas, Western multilateral institutions often do not question whether simply adding women’s projects to their gender mainstreaming and/or women’s empowerment dossiers may contribute to sustain unequal gendered power relations (Kandiyoti, 2007; Cheng, 2011). But how is gender understood among international and local practitioners? More importantly, how is women’s empowerment translated into practice? In chapter four I will try to answer these questions with reference to women’s political empowerment programmes in Jordan.

Eschle (2000) argues, and I agree, that there is a current shift away from focusing on women’s issues, as well as an elimination of programmes specifically targeting women, in the sense that mainstreaming has become ‘part of a broader instrumental-capitalist restructuring agenda that has created an elite system of gender experts without opening the political space or changing the material conditions for women at the grassroots’ (Eschle, 2000: 215–6). But in a context where neoliberal and economic policies become the priority, will feminist intentions and objectives risk being marginalised and instrumentalised?

This has been the case in the Middle East. In the second part of this chapter I aim to give an empirical twist to this debate, starting from an analysis of democratisation practices in the region, including the role of women. Moreover, by presenting the involvement of women’s movements in the region during the liberation phases and in the more recent uprisings, I aim to provide an adequate analysis of the position of women in Middle Eastern societies ‘grounded in a detailed examination of the political projects of contemporary states and of their historical transformation’ (Kandiyoti, 1992: 2) – as I will also do in the context of Jordan in the next chapter.

Discussing ‘transformative agendas’ in the context of the Middle East

Gender mainstreaming has been cross-national from the start, as well as dependent on gender relations and national political contexts (Eveline and Bacchi, 2005).

Governments, EU and UN bodies, women’s groups and international organisations have been involved in gender mainstreaming initiatives in the MENA region (Nusair, 2009). However, before addressing the extent to which feminist scholars have contributed to the literature on gender mainstreaming, it is necessary to introduce the ways in which external pressures have influenced democratisation processes in the region.

Western countries have influenced and instrumentalised the political economies of the region not only through military invasions, but also through the huge amounts of funding poured into regimes and civil society. The use of non-military strategies to shape and control the politics of transitional states in the region, has been defined by Horn (2010) as a ‘gentle invasion’ (4). As Horn (2010) argues, through this subtle power, democratic development is encouraged, and the hegemonic use of this ‘indirect power influences the rules of civil society and its development’ (6). The link between national states and civil society is extremely relevant, mainly because states act as gatekeepers, shaping and framing the trajectory of norms and interests within civil society. Moreover, according to Horn (2010), the interaction between domestic social action and transnational networks is fundamental in framing issues for the public agenda: indeed, through the influence of transnational actors, many states have redefined their ‘national interests’ and foreign policy initiatives in relation to human rights and democratisation (Horn, 2010: 7). However, the ‘democracy promotion’ programmes pursued by the US and some EU countries have been instrumental in maintaining security in an era of political transition – especially between 11 September 2001 and the recent uprisings (2011, 2012) – rather than focusing on understanding the interests of the civil societies involved.

The interest in democratisation policies started right after 1989, when the US promoted democratisation through ‘small democracy’ grants offered by its embassies, at first especially in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The most significant actor in the area of assistance in terms of budget at that time was the US

Agency for International Development (USAID).¹⁷ USAID had previously been dedicated to economic growth, social development and infrastructure; it then started to be involved in projects with political relevance, and to operate in areas where it had never previously worked, such as Russia.

The demise of military rule in South America, and of Communism in Europe, obscured the essentially reactive nature of American interests, as well as the exclusion of the Arab world from a perceived global trend. However, the attention to democracy was there: it especially focused on electoral democracy, constitutional reform and the development of civil society (Brown and el-Din Shahin, 2010: 16). The US was not alone in the field; other donor states, especially European states, demonstrated a new enthusiasm for the promotion of democracy. Some countries were pioneering, in ways the US learned to emulate: I am referring to the German model of party foundations,¹⁸ which were introduced in the US through the creation of the NDI and the IRI to contribute to the democratisation policies promoted initially by the first Bush administration (1988–1992). Finally, the two most relevant international financial institutions, namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, showed increasing interest in ‘governance’ too. ‘Good governance’ became particularly important in underpinning US interventions in the region, ‘building up into the aggressive wave to “democratize” the region, which gained momentum after September 11th’ (Jad, 2004: 4).

The attention paid to the Arab world prior to 11 September 2001 was more focused on maintaining the stability of regimes than on promoting democracy. The issue of democratisation was not completely ignored, but by comparison with other global regions, it was less recurrent. Indeed, throughout the 1990s and in the first eight months of the George W. Bush administration, the US saw the ‘undemocratic *status quo* as far preferable to the instability and anti-Western sentiment that many feared would sweep the region were authoritarian rulers to fall from power’ (Brown and el-Din Shahin, 2010: 18). According to US diplomats who worked on US-Middle East relations prior to 11 September 2001, democracy and human rights issues were never included on the agendas of meetings with Arab leaders. The US government regarded

¹⁷ www.usaid.gov [accessed 9 April 2013].

¹⁸ Party foundations are closely linked with a particular political party, although they have a distinct legal status. The most important examples of party foundations are the German *Stiftungen* (foundations), such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (linked with the Social Democrats), the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (linked with the Christian Democrats) and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (the Free Democrats).

authoritarian regimes as preferable to the Islamist opposition movements that were gaining ground in the early 1990s. This hesitant approach to democracy was often criticised as ‘hypocritical because it coupled platitudes about the importance of democracy with cosy relationship with authoritarian regimes’ (Brown and el-Din Shahin, 2010: 20) – a relationship that has also been criticised more recently with reference to the 2011 uprisings in the region. Indeed, during the uprisings, civil society actors were very suspicious of possible interference by foreign countries, not least because several Western nations have had economic relationships with dictators and profiteers for many years, mainly with reference to oil interests (Ross, 2011).

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, some Bush administration officials accepted the essence of this critique. Aid for the region increased accordingly, especially after the war in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq: tens of millions of dollars were poured into the effort to ‘democratise’ post-Saddam Iraq and Afghanistan, and ‘democracy promotion’ initiatives – such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI),¹⁹ which was launched by the US State Department in late 2002 – were created for the rest of the region. This was also when attention to women’s projects and gender mainstreaming increased. The administration expanded the funding and scope of the Middle East programmes run by USAID, the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).²⁰ However, although democracy assistance was supported with several hundred million dollars, the new rhetoric did not result in anything like the dramatic shift that was implied; ‘nor it was accompanied by the development of viable tools to realise the ambitious vision of transforming the region on liberal and democratic lines’ (Brown and el-Din Shahin, 2010: 27).

This was particularly true of women’s projects, and this was when feminist scholars in the region started to place more attention on the analysis of gender mainstreaming practices in conflict, post-conflict and peace-building situations, such as (but not exclusively²¹) in Iraq (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009b) and Palestine (Nusair, 2009; Richter-Devroe, 2009). Although, during various speeches after the invasion of Iraq, President Bush pointed out that the advancement of women’s rights in the region

¹⁹ The MEPI ‘offers assistance, training, and support to groups and individuals striving to create positive change in the society’, working in 18 countries and territories, (<http://mepi.state.gov/> [accessed 24 January 2013]).

²⁰ The NED is a ‘private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world’, (<http://www.ned.org/> [accessed 24 January 2013]).

²¹ See also the case of Afghanistan (Kandiyoti, 2007; Larson, 2008).

was fundamental, and that the advancement of freedom was giving women new hope and new rights (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2003 and 2004), Al-Ali and Pratt (2009b) have demonstrated that the military invasion and consequent reconstruction activities marginalised women without considering or addressing their real basic needs, leaving them in a worse humanitarian situation than before. Institutions have easily instrumentalised women's rights in the region, but women have also been very active in making their voices heard. The authors argue that gender mainstreaming, as interpreted and practised by transnational and international actors, may contribute to 'hardening perceptions of national and religious divisions in conflict situations, as gender is reproduced as a marker of difference', without 'transforming gender relations in ways that empower women as a means of building peaceful societies' (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a: 257–258).

As with Iraq, the relationship between local organisations and international donors has been discussed and criticised in relation to Palestine (Jad, 2004; Nusair, 2009, Richter-Devroe, 2009). The Palestinian women's movement has been criticised for operating within donor-driven global frameworks, with the result that its agenda has become both less indigenous and less explicitly political (Jad, 2004; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2008). Especially since the declaration of the Oslo Accords²², Palestinian women have been demanding the reform of civil, criminal and *shari'a* legislation (Islamic law) from a gender equality perspective. However, some scholars argue that these groups' focus has shifted, from participation in the liberation movement with attention to equality, to 'survival-level interventions to alleviate the suffering of the beleaguered women they help' (Kvinna till Kvinna/UNDP, 2010: 4).

Other studies on gender mainstreaming in the region focus on the role played by women's activism and movements in the promotion of human rights, through the utilisation of UN processes and global governance at both the local and the national level (Walby, 2005; Nusair, 2009; Moghadam and Sadiqi, 2006). Women's activism in the MENA region has benefited from the experience acquired by various women's groups in national liberation movements, in political groups and trade unions, and through participation in UN international conferences on women's rights (Nusair, 2009: 136). Such conferences have highlighted the concerns of women's rights activists and organisations, and have facilitated the local, regional and transnational

²² Signed in September 1993 and known as the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles.

advocacy of women's rights.

Although women's activism has opened up to the international community, the risk of the instrumentalisation of women's issues for other ends – political, economic and security – has always been there. The 'gentle invasion' of local civil society, carried out mainly by the US but recently also by the EU, is a problem that local organisations are facing and trying to deal with. But how did women's organisations get to this point? What was women's role in democratisation processes in the region?

Women as actors in democratisation processes

Civil society and local agents are some of the actors who can influence democratisation processes, as we have seen with the 2011 uprisings in the region, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia. As Pratt shows (2007), 'democratisation depends upon the ideological debates between civil society actors and, in particular, the ability or desire of civil society actors to put forward a vision that challenges authoritarianism' (127). Women are active agents alongside men in this – 'builders of movements and societies' (Moghadam, 2003: 28) in their 'war of position' (Gramsci, 1971: 229) against authoritarianism. The role of the state is central to this discussion, and will be analysed in greater detail in chapter two with reference to Jordan. Much of the existing literature on gender and the state refers mainly to European, North American and Australian experiences (Pringle and Watson, 1992; Kantola, 2010; Orloff, 2010), shedding light on the diversity of feminist approaches. Among scholars who discuss the historical transformations of states and the contestations of state power in relation to women's positions and gender issues in the Middle East (Hatem, 1993; Kandiyoti, 1988; Badran, 1993), the discussion has focused more on the conceptualisation of heterogeneous institutional arenas with different power relations (Al-Ali, 2000). Mindful of the different conceptualisations of the state,²³ in this study

²³ The significance of the state is related to the historical transformations of the specific context of analysis. Liberal theory considers the state a neutral arbiter which in practice can be captured by interest groups, in this case men. A Foucauldian approach views the state as an apparatus of regulation and soft domination, recognising the diverse and sometimes contradictory apparatuses at work, but without taking account of the constitution of interests in sexual politics (Foucault, 1980). Another approach takes sexuality into consideration, defining the state as a class state producing effects on sex and gender in pursuit of class interests (Connell, 1987: 127); Marxist feminism has seen the state's motivation in class terms, understanding its effect as the maintenance of men's subordination of women. In this approach it is not clear why gender effects are essential for the reproduction of capitalism or the maintenance of profit. Another group of theorists argue that the state is a patriarchal

I will draw on the notion developed by Connell (1987), who focuses on the institutionalisation of gender (126). The fact that the state embodies and also creates ‘gender regimes’ might serve as a useful analytical tool for understanding the relationship among and between women’s organisations, international organisations and the Jordanian government. Analysing the role of the state will highlight the reproduction of gender inequalities through various dimensions of state policy, the gendered construction of citizenship, and the dynamics of incorporation of national and ethnic collectiveness into modern states (Kandiyoti, 1991a: 1).

Women’s movements in the Middle East have been potential agents for democratisation, and they emerged ‘amid two major political projects, independence and modernisation, stemming from secular nationalism and Islamic modernism respectively’ (Jad, 2004: 2). Historically, women’s movements in the Middle East, although presenting differences arising from their diverse contexts, have shared some common political factors, such as their links to processes of modernisation and development, the tensions between secular and religious tendencies, and links to nationalist movements (Al-Ali, 2003: 217). Women in the Middle East participated effectively in liberation movements during the age of colonialism, such as in Egypt (Ahmed, 1992b; Abu-Lughod, 1998), Algeria (Cheref, 2006; Lazreg, 1994) and Palestine (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2008; Jad, 2004). Secular nationalists in particular saw women as an integral part of the ‘new nation’ in the aftermath of colonial occupation (Badran, 1995; Lazreg, 1994), and many women saw the recognition of their social rights as a consequence of independence. In Egypt, women’s participation in the nationwide marches and protests against British colonial power in 1919 represented a continuation of the activities of women during previous decades (Ahmed, 1992a; Badran, 1995). During the war of liberation in Algeria (1954–1962), the participation of more than 10,000 women fighting for independence had a positive impact on the vision of the National Liberation Front, which started to consider women’s empowerment as central (Cheref, 2006: 64). As with Algeria, the impact of the occupation on women’s rights has similarly affected the Palestinian women’s movement in the context of the wider liberation struggle against Israeli oppression.

institution from the outset (MacKinnon, 1982; Pateman, 1983), created as the institutionalisation of masculine violence, as the male point of view in sexual politics, or as a form of patriarchy in the development of civil society. The patriarchal state can be seen as the centre of a reverberating set of power relations and political processes in which patriarchy is both constructed and contested (Connell, 1987: 130).

According to Jad (2004), the 'heroic role played by Algerian and Palestinian women in the battles to liberate their countries was one outcome of this phase in the growth of women's organizations' (2). Revolutionary processes opened up spaces for women's rights to be recognised, but to what extent was gender justice promoted by the new regimes?

The new state leaders quickly discarded the idea of democratising their political systems, and instead installed a variety of authoritarian regimes. There is much disagreement as to why authoritarian rule in the Arab world has been so persistent. Some researchers have emphasised the importance of structural factors such as institutional reform and economic development and of political culture in the transition to and consolidation of democracy (Haynes, 2001). Many scholars have outlined Arab leaders' resistance to power sharing and meaningful reform (Sivan, 1997; Brumberg, 1995). Others stress the 'importance of citizens' attitudes and values, and democratic values need not precede, but can rather follow, elite-led transitions involving the reform of political institutions and procedures' (Rose et al., 1998: 98).

In regard to women's emancipation, many newly independent nations, such as Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, 'installed 'state feminism', introducing economic and social policies aimed at integrating women into the labour market and the new nation' (Jad, 2004: 3). But measures for the emancipation of women did not coincide with a drive for democratisation or the creation of a civil society in which gender interests could be represented. Indeed, these measures were 'mostly part of the general thrust of "dirigiste" and frequently authoritarian and repressive regimes' (Kandiyoti, 1991a: 13). Those governments that did grant women new rights proceeded simultaneously to abolish independent women's organisations, creating government-related and controlled organisations for women. Under Nasser in Egypt, after women gained the suffrage in 1956, the regime moved to outlaw all feminist organisations. In Algeria in 1962, the government, as part of its programme to mobilise various sectors of society in support of 'Algerian socialism', created the National Union of Algerian Women (*Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes*), but this organisation never captured feminists' interests, and was considered a co-opted organisation from its inception (Cheref, 2006: 68). Not only in Egypt and Algeria, but also in Jordan and Tunisia, among other countries, such official women's organisations became discredited because 'their function and activities were largely

determined by the priorities set by the existing regimes' (Hatem, 1993: 30).

Women's dependence on the state to promote gender equality and social justice raises problematic issues. This is not only because women's rights are easily compromised and instrumentalised to favour conservative groups, as has happened in Iraq (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009b) or with gender quotas in Jordan,²⁴ but also because women have often been excluded from political decision-making processes after independence, as they have been 'forgotten immediately at the end of the war' (Cheref, 2006: 65). In the case of Algeria, for instance, women have studied and worked in greater numbers, but they have been largely excluded from the political arena since independence, and little has been done to change the categorisation of women according to their marital status (as men's mothers, daughters and wives) rather than as women in their own right. The disappointment with state policies that have done little or nothing to change women's status as 'dependants' on male citizens – known as the 'Algerian syndrome' (Jad, 2004: 3) – has especially affected the women's movement in the Gulf area. As Skalli (2006) argues, the significance of the increasing numbers of women in schools and in the private and public sectors 'is threatened by the vigilant eye of the political regime and Islamist groups and often negated by conservative family laws institutionalising discrimination' (39). Women's activists are therefore 'forced to be more strategic in their interventions and creative in their actions and alliances if they want to transform their realities in a meaningful way' (Skalli, 2006: 39). Since women's issues are so symbolic, at both the national and the international level, women's groups need to be very careful in their engagements with the state in order to avoid a backlash against women's rights, as happened in Egypt and Iraq.

In the 1980s and 1990s a continuum of dependent and independent women's movements started to emerge throughout the region. As Al-Ali points out (2003: 4), in Iraq no independent women's movement was feasible in the context of greater political repression; in Tunisia, state co-option was a matter of concern for independent women's organisations, as were the state's limitations on political space for women's organisations in Egypt and Jordan, where some women's organisations were banned (Al-Atiyat, 2003). During those years, when economic and social crises

²⁴ See chapter three for a discussion of the introduction of gender quotas in Jordan.

pervaded many Arab states, most leaders²⁵ only made minimal responses to demands for economic and political change. The end of the ‘communist bloc’ further contributed to the ‘retreat of progressive nationalism’ (Jad, 2004: 4), while the Israeli threat and unresolved issue of Palestine persisted, and the Iranian revolution brought Islamist religious leadership to power.

After the September 2001 attacks, the war in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq negatively affected those two countries, the entire region and the attention to women’s rights, as I will depict throughout the thesis. Women’s role in democratisation processes in the Middle East must be studied through the differing political projects of nation-states, with their distinct histories, relationships to colonialism and the West, class politics, ideological uses of Islamic idioms, and struggles over the role of Islamic law in state legal apparatuses (Abu-Lughod, 1998: 5). It is through this framework²⁶ that I will analyse the participation of women in democratisation processes in Jordan, raising question about the representation of women’s gender interests and women’s participation. But first it is necessary to discuss the extent to which women have been involved in the recent uprisings (2011–2012) in the region, together with the significance of their participation in relation to debates on ‘gendering’ democratisation.

Is women’s participation enough? The case of the recent uprisings

History shows that women and gender have always been key to both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary processes (Al-Ali, 2012). On the one hand, revolutions have opened up some space for women’s organising, as in the case of the Egyptian anti-colonial and independence movement and the Palestinian struggle against Israeli

²⁵ In the mid- to late 1960s, the Arab Socialist Ba‘ath Party led by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar took power in both Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein succeeded Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr in 1979. In Syria, first a military committee led by Salah Jadid ruled the country, and later Hafez al-Assad ruled until 2000, when he was succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad. In 1979, Egypt under Nasser’s successor, Anwar Sadat, concluded a peace treaty with Israel, and in 1981 Mubarak came to power.

²⁶ When I started to work on this thesis, I decided not to directly focus on Islam, since I did not want my research to fall within the category of literature on ‘women and Islam’. Although I think that Islam, or the deconstruction of Islam, is central to the study of every phenomenon with reference to Muslim countries, I decided to consider Islam as a factor that is constitutive of personal identity. As I will discuss in chapters three and five, the issue of religion came up only when I was analysing the personal experiences of female candidates. The attention I gave to it reflected the extent to which it came up during my interviews. Future research might address the role of Islam more specifically in relation to the promotion of women’s rights among ‘women in politics’ in Jordan, especially with reference to the recent events in the region; this was not the specific focus of my research.

occupation. On the other hand, history has revealed that women have been left out of decision-making positions after the revolution, as the case of Algeria's war of liberation clearly demonstrates. The question of women's participation in decision-making processes is very pertinent in relation to the recent uprisings in the region, particularly in Egypt (Sholkamy, 2012a-b; Moll, 2012; Elyachar and Winegar, 2012). Women have been at the forefront of the recent demonstrations, especially in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. Although the Middle East consists of heterogonous countries and diverse contexts, a common feeling of frustration pervaded the region during 2011. People were pressured and oppressed by their regimes, and they were angered by rising prices, falling standards of living and high levels of joblessness, especially among the youth (Sharpe, 2011: 118). A lack of real reform and the spread of corruption were also triggering factors. All these 'resentments and objections accumulated and built up over years and decades' (Sharpe, 2011: 118): people did not decide overnight to take to the streets, but did so on the basis of a long period of frustration, as well as of previous demonstrations and a desire for change. During an event organised by Vital Voices in February 2011 in Amman, Esraa, a young woman activist from Egypt, told me during a private conversation:

I have been demonstrating for the last five years, for different political reasons each time. But every time I went to the square I was hoping that the change would come. During those years I always saw that political celebrations were possible, but they did not bring change. We needed these last demonstrations to begin the change (Amman, 23 February 2011).

The regional political order, which had taken shape with the rise of post-colonial regimes in the late 1940s, broke down within just few months; the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, and the death of Khaled Saeed in Egypt, were the turning points for the demonstrations in which Esraa participated. At the beginning of the uprisings, democratic outcomes seemed possible to those who took to the streets in many countries in the region (Heydemann and Leenders, 2011: 648). However, the Arab regimes in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain intensified their repression of the mass uprisings, and the smaller protests in Morocco, Algeria and Jordan did not have much relevance.

The participation of women during these events has been the subject of discussion, not only among scholars (Winegar, 2012; Al-Ali, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2012; Hafez, 2012; Sholkamy, 2012a-b; Elyachar, 2012), but also in the Western media. Several European and American newspapers portrayed women not as subservient, oppressed and restricted to the home, but as a fundamental source of strength during the protests. Women were described by the Guardian as instrumental and as key players, especially in the ‘nitty-gritty organisation that turned Tahrir Square from a moment into a movement’ (Rice et al., 2011). The question ‘where are the women in the uprisings?’ was put to many scholars working on women in the Middle East (Winegar, 2012; Al-Ali, 2012: 27), but in my view it was an easy and provocative question to ask. Women were participating on the streets just as they had done in the past, without a doubt. As Winegar (2012) describes on the basis of her experience of the Egyptian demonstrations, many women – more or less known activists – rallied people to Tahrir Square, and many others also supported the uprising indirectly, by providing food and medical supplies, helping friends and family to demonstrate (Winegar, 2012: 68). Women supported the revolution, both in the streets and in their homes, according to their capabilities and their political visions. This was not just individual women; ‘women participated side by side with men in the protests across the region’ (Al-Ali, 2012: 27).

Abla, the passionate Egyptian activist I was listening to at the Foundation for the Future event, very clearly pointed out that women have always been there to demonstrate: ‘Women were there, as well as men were there. The demonstrations did not start from nothing, and women were there even before them’ (Amman, 14 April, 2011). Although the presence of women in the streets gained more prominence in the media during the 2011 uprisings, women have tried to make their voices heard in the past as well.

Two years on from the beginning of the uprisings, many scholars and activists are now wondering whether and to what extent women will have a space in the new political decision-making processes (Al-Ali, 2012; Hafez, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2012; Sholkamy, 2012b; Pratt, 2013). This is not only a question of numbers or of the presence of women in specific political and transitional bodies; it is also about whether gender issues are in danger of becoming sidelined in decision-making processes, or women’s rights in danger of being violated (Al-Ali, 2012). In August 2011, around 1,000 women in Tunisia held a rally to remind people in their country of

the 1956 Personal Status Code, which provides equality between men and women (Anderson, 2011). In Egypt, many women feel that the ‘equality spirit’ of Tahrir Square has disappeared: no women were present in the constitutional commission, and power seems to be still in the hands of male elders, who are not looking for change (Zecchinelli, 2011); moreover, sexual harassment and violence against women is becoming a widespread problem, as recent events demonstrate²⁷ (Kandiyoti, 2013). As Hafez suggests (2012) in her critical re-examination of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ between the state and the people of Egypt, women’s activism needs to fall into a ‘solid women’s front’ (41) in order for women to shape the future of their nation. During her presentation at the conference, Abla at one point said:

Why were women’s issues not put on the agenda of the Higher Commission? Because the regime has not been dismantled completely; the old mentality is still not eradicated, and women’s issues are not part of it. For instance, I have read all the agendas of all parties, from left to right. They are all addressing economic issues, but when it comes to women’s issues, they all become shy.

In the case of Egypt, only ten of the 508 members of the Egyptian parliament are women. Women who ran on party lists were placed far down those lists, meaning that they had virtually no chance of getting into office, whether their parties were Islamist or liberal (Garcia-Navarro, 2012). At the beginning of the 2011 uprisings, everything that was connected to Mubarak’s regime was rejected, including ‘legal reforms that have benefited women in the past decade, and have guaranteed their free mobility, right to unilateral divorce, and political representation through a quota system’, because they were known as Suzanne Mubarak’s laws (Sholkamy, 2012a). This resulted from the rejection of the whole discourse of gender equality by youth, radicals and the left as ‘a figment of a Western imagination’ and as connected to the old regime (Sholkamy, 2012a). According to Sholkamy (2012a), young activists and socialist parties were not sympathetic to gender, either as a political category or as basis for rights and entitlements. Gender as a concept is still not regarded as a lens through which to analyse power relations within society. Many are the challenges

²⁷ I am referring to episodes of violence against women and sexual harassment in the streets after the uprisings started in Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey, as described by Kandiyoti, 2013.

faced by women activists, in Egypt and in the region, such as the increase of militarisation and the abuse of women's sexuality (Al-Ali, 2012), and unless women continue their campaigns on gender issues, their rights are likely to continue to be instrumentalised and misused. The significance of the state in 'reproducing, maintaining and challenging prevailing gender regimes, ideologies, discourses and relations' (Al-Ali, 2012: 31) still continues in the aftermath of the uprisings.

Conclusions

If democratisation is considered a process of 'making democratic' gender regimes (Rai, 2008: 59), then 'is democracy the solution?', as Abla asked during her speech. According to Rouda, a Tunisian activist who replied to Abla, democracy is the way forward: 'What is worrying women at this time is what is worrying all the people of Tunisia: we want to dismantle the autocratic system, and then we will work towards a democratic one.' But democracy, I believe, cannot transform power relations between women and men as long as gender issues and social justice are not included or problematised in its discourse, practices or policies. Thus, gender justice is at the core of democracy. As Moghadam (2011) has said, women may need democracy in order to flourish, but democracy needs women in order to be enduring and inclusive, since gender orders will challenge the power relations of neo-patriarchal and neoliberal systems.

Throughout this chapter I have raised questions about women's participation, the representation of gender interests, and gender mainstreaming programmes, with reference to the region. But to what extent do these debates influence the gender dimension of democratisation? How are gender issues and women's rights discussed and elaborated at the local, national and transnational levels?

The position of women must be addressed in order to carry out the social change that will enable much of the MENA region to deal with international agreements and conventions, and with local structures. Changing the position of women in society and addressing grievances that contribute to the spread of extremism are prerequisites for building a society that respects human rights, basic freedoms and democracy. The question of women's liberation is related to the questions of representation and democracy. Democracy is not possible without challenging male-dominated state structures, questioning the boundaries between politics and ordinary life, and

addressing the neoliberal agendas of international development projects. I think that one characteristic of democracy in contemporary societies is the guarantee of basic civil and political rights – such as freedom of expression, organisation and assembly – in order to allow citizens to hold their representatives accountable for the public good. However, although the ultimate goal is to act for gender interests, we must ask: how can women who have moved into the state bureaucracy or conventional political parties make an impact on mainstream politics without being absorbed by it? And how can women who rely on international gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment practices win recognition for their interests? Even though states have incorporated (or better, co-opted) participants in women's movements, it is still extremely difficult for those on the 'inside' to translate the goals of those movements into concrete policies capable of having a positive impact on the lives of female citizens. Although it is extremely difficult for women activists to strike a balance between demanding their rights and dealing with pressure from their regimes, the belief that the state has the ability to promote women's rights 'might seriously diminish women activists' credibility and might limit their strategies and possible achievements in the long run' (Al-Ali, 2012: 30). This is why we also need to ask what type of women's participation we want: what types of women are leading, and whom do they represent? More importantly, how do women at the grassroots perceive this relationship between women activists and the state in relation to the representation of their interests?

The question of women's participation cannot be reduced to numbers, because simply being a woman is not enough to represent women's rights, as I will further discuss in the following chapters with reference to Jordan. If the gender dimension of democratisation is to be discussed, then our analysis needs to involve an exploration of how women's participation in decision-making programmes relates to the country's historical context, and to the authoritarian state, its society, its domestic relations and the international community. Do gender issues and women's rights risk becoming instrumentalised? The answer is yes, and not only does the instrumentalisation occur at the level of the state, but it is also very problematic in light of the relationship between the interconnected international, national and local contexts. On one hand, 'democracy' promotion programmes need to be challenged over the ways in which they promote women's empowerment in the light of their neoliberal framework. On the other hand, the analysis of the ways in which state

policies in the region are implicated in the promotion of gender justice has revealed the extent to which the state can challenge existing power relations – for instance, by granting women more political or personal rights – or can reinforce oppressive gender relations by abolishing reforms or controlling women’s activism; all measures that will harm neither the regime itself nor the status quo. In what follows, I will discuss these tensions more specifically with reference to Jordan’s socio-political context.

CHAPTER TWO

JORDANIAN POLITICS: STATE, SOCIETY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Female candidates' stories

Hind

When I first met Hind at a workshop for female candidates organised by the NDI in Amman before the 2010 parliamentary elections, I thought she was an extremely strong and passionate woman who loved being involved in and cared about politics. I was right. Her outspokenness is what impressed me the most; her attitude emerged not only during public events, but also during the one-to-one interviews I did with her. Hind is a middle-aged woman from Central Badia;¹ she considers herself a Bedouin, a 'true and pure' Jordanian. She is married and the mother of three children. Hind lives in one of the upper-class neighbourhoods in West Amman, Abdoun, and she is the owner of a private company that works in media and TV production. Her interest in politics dates back to her father's involvement in political action, as she told me during a discussion at her office in Amman: 'Let me tell you more about my background. My father was a political prisoner for 22 years in Syria.'² At that time I was only a child, but that was when that I started to be interrogated by the *mukhabarat* so as to be able to go and visit him' (Amman, 2 March 2011). It was then that she started to wonder why her father had been imprisoned, why she had to be questioned before she was allowed to talk to him, and who was the responsible for all of this. She did not want to tell me more about that period of her life, but the expression in her eyes showed that this intrusion of the state and its institutions was at the core of her interest in politics, as were her Bedouin roots. Although she now lives in one of the richest areas of Amman, during her campaign she knocked on all the doors in the village she comes from, trying not to lose her connection with her birthplace. Hind was a candidate for parliament in both in 2007 and 2010, and, as she

¹ Jordan is divided into 12 governorates, and three areas in the north, centre and south called Central, Northern and Southern Badia, which include different governorates.

² From 13 July 1971 until 13 July 1993.

told me over coffee, 'I will run until the day I die' (Amman, 1 February 2011).³ Her campaign and activism are mostly focused on the renewal of the political system, starting with a fight against corruption. Her strong position against the government did not make her campaign easy at all: when she was a candidate in 2007, she claims she was poisoned. That event did not undermine her strength and passion to run for parliament or campaign for justice, as she did before and after the 2010 elections, continuing to focus on the fight against corruption and being aware of the *mukhabarat's* constant control over her life.

Terez

I was excited about the type of discussion I was going to have before meeting Terez, since she works for and is an activist of the JWU, which is the largest independent women's organisation in the country. Every time I went to the JWU I felt very well welcome: people wanted to help me, and they were interested in my research. This is why, before meeting Terez, I felt I was going to have an interesting discussion. I met Terez only that day, and our interview lasted a couple of hours. As I had expected, she was very welcoming and willing to share her life experience with me. Terez lives in Madaba, a Christian-majority governorate in the south of Amman. She does not speak English, but thanks to the support of one of her colleagues, we managed to have an enlightening conversation. Terez is a Christian woman in her 50s, married with no children. She has been a women's rights activist since 1977, and has been demanding the development of women's rights for all these years. She decided to participate in the 2010 elections because of the increase in the number of seats assigned to women in the new quota system.⁴ While smoking her cigarette and drinking tea in her office (which reminded me of a library), she opened up, telling me that one of her main obstacles during the campaign consisted in the lack of support from her tribe, which decided to back a male candidate. Terez is one of the first activists who started to work for the JWU, and she embodies the JWU's politicised and critical vision of the promotion of women's rights.⁵ Indeed, while discussing gender justice advocacy she appeared rather frustrated at the lack of awareness of the status of women's rights in

³ Hind participated in the 2013 elections and she won a seat as member of parliament through the quota-system.

⁴ In 2010 the reserved-seats quota for women in parliament was doubled from six to 12. The introduction of a quota system will be explained and discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

⁵ In contrast with other women's organisations' approach, the JWU constantly deals with issues concerning violence against women, honour crimes, nationality and personal status law.

the country among men and women, and the lack of political will from institutions, as she persuasively told me: 'Most of the programmes did not include women's point of view, and it was very difficult to convince the community and the institutions about the importance of this' (Amman, 17 April 2011). During her campaign she particularly focused on the promotion of women's rights and the amendment of specific laws that discriminate against women.⁶ During the interview she pointed to the lack of interest in women's rights among her community, and the difficulties that activists had had to deal with in the past and still face today in campaigning for gender justice.

Ahlam

Ahlam wanted to bring me to her favourite place outside Amman, Fuheis.⁷ I was sitting next to her in the car as she was driving like 'a man', as she would tell me while going around a bend quite fast. It was a sunny Friday morning in March 2011, and Ahlam wanted to take me out for breakfast. Before arriving at the café, she stopped the car by the side of a hilly road and then, looking outside with twinkling eyes framed by a light brown hijab, she said: 'Whenever I come here I feel the originality of my heritage. This place brings back memories of Nablus, the city in which I was born' (11 March 2011). Ahlam is a middle-aged woman from Palestine. After she finished secondary school, she came to Jordan: 'When I came here, the intifada started in Palestine; it was in 1987. At that time it was a big challenge for a girl who never did anything by herself, even crossing the street, to start a life on her own.' Ahlam studied finance and accounting at the University of Jordan. Although she managed to sustain herself on a scholarship, she felt she had to become more independent of her family. That is why she decided to marry when she was 21, to a man with 'significant social and intellectual status', as she put it. After her only child had grown up, she decided to divorce, without the support of her family, since she did not like her life as a married woman. Ahlam is now an independent single mother, working as a freelance consultant for companies and NGOs, after being involved in managerial jobs at the Ministry of Social and Political Development for many years. She was a candidate in the 2010 elections only, as she felt that was the right time to bring about change. In her campaign she particularly focused on programmes for

⁶ See the last section of this chapter for an analysis of the status of women's rights in the country.

⁷ Fuheis is a town in the governorate of Balqa, around 20 kilometres north-west of Amman.

youth, and she managed to reach out to supporters through the use of social media such as Facebook. Ahlam is very respectful of Islam, and every time religion came up during our discussions, she wanted to make it clear that Islam does not discriminate against women. Religion is a big part of her life, and although she does not like to go the mosque on Fridays, she loves to pray throughout the day, wherever she is. Together with religion, Palestine was another topic of discussion, especially the ways she had managed to integrate her life into Jordan, the host country. Most of the time Palestine was referred to as the place of dreams, to which she wanted to return to live in the future if ‘the political situation will allow me to do that’, as she put it. She felt that Jordan would never become her country, not only because her family still lives in Palestine, but also because Jordan has never granted her full citizen status, although she has been living here for more than 20 years.

*Amilah*⁸

I came into contact with Amilah through the NDI, since she was one of the participants in their programmes. I met her and her sister in a café close to downtown Amman on 30 January 2011. I felt that Amilah was very sceptical about meeting with me: she seemed to be willing to tell me her story, but without sharing too much. However, we managed to establish reciprocal trust during the course of the conversation. Amilah wore a black hijab that made her dark brown eyes stand out. After finding out that I was married, she first asked me if I had any children, and I answered with the much-used ‘*lissa*’ (not yet). She told me that I should not wait too long, since I was going to become too old to be a mother. I then asked her about her personal life. She is in her early 30s, and was the youngest female candidate I interviewed. She got married when she was 17 and now has six children. She comes from the poor area of East Amman. After finishing secondary school she started to take care of her husband and her children. Amilah has always been involved in volunteer work in her community, which she describes as ‘an area that is more traditional and less developed than other neighbourhoods in Amman’. In 2008 she decided to get more involved with her community, and she is now a consultant for small projects targeting youth development in schools in her area. It was her increased attention to her community that made her decide to run for parliament, mainly

⁸ Amilah is a pseudonym. I have used it instead of the real name for security reasons.

because she wanted to bring about change in her area. However, her decision to run as a candidate was not greatly welcomed by the people in her tribe, whether men or women, as she said: 'In my area women do not support women to participate in the elections, mainly because their tribe tells them to back men and also, I have to say, often women are jealous of other women's success.' Amilah decided to run by herself, against her tribe's wishes. Her house was set on fire five days before the elections. Luckily no one was hurt, but Amilah did not find out who did it, although she had some suspicions. She was sure of one thing, as she told me: 'They hated me. But I am not scared: I want to fight for it and I will run again.' Amilah's story demonstrates to an extreme the importance that candidates place (or do not place) on their tribe's support, and reflects the strength of this woman who is willing to campaign for change in her own community.

The brief stories of Hind, Terez, Ahlam and Amilah give a small indication of the diversity of class, age, background, place of residence, place of origin, tribal relations and religion to which each of these women belongs. Hind, Terez, Ahlam and Amilah are only four of the 26 female candidates I interviewed, and they are not representative of their diversity in terms of class, visions, campaigns, backgrounds, and demography. However, the snapshots of these female candidates serve to introduce the main debates and themes I will analyse throughout this and subsequent chapters, referring to specific Jordanian historical, political, economic and social contexts.

Hind's Bedouin roots and Ahlam's Palestinian origins point towards the importance of the concept of national unity in Jordan's political context; moreover, Terez and Amilah's lack of support from their tribes extends the discourse on the creation of national identity the role of the state and the status of women's rights. The stories of these female candidates also raise telling points in relation to women's political participation, such as the lack of faith in female candidates, the introduction of quotas, violence against women, and the lack of awareness of women's rights – all issues I aim to address throughout the thesis. In this chapter I will present Jordan's historical, political and social contexts in order to better contextualise the development of women's organisations and the status of women's rights within the country's political system. While analysing democratisation processes in Jordan, from both a national and an international perspective, I will also pay attention to the recent

uprisings in the country. In the second part of the chapter I aim to introduce the role of women's organisations in the promotion of women's rights and their relationship with the state, a discussion that I will continue to develop in subsequent chapters.

State, tribes, neighbouring countries and democratisation

A general consensus seems to exist among scholars that some of the most salient elements of the Jordanian political system are its tribalism, its authoritarianism, the Palestinian-Jordanian split, and the consequent importance of the concept of national unity (Layne, 1994; Brand, 1994; Lynch, 1999; Massad, 2001; Adely, 2012a; Alon, 2009; Shryock, 1997). Fida Adely (2012a), in her engaging book *Gendered Paradoxes* on women, education and development in Jordan, considers the process of the making of Jordan a story of 'British-imposed state and Hashemite efforts to create a nation and a national narrative that had the Hashemites at their centre' (31).

Jordan is formally a constitutional monarchy; an independent state was created in 1946. However, according to Shryock (1997) and Adely (2012a), full independence from the British was achieved only after 1956, when their control over the military came to an end. 'It was after 1956 that the project of creating a national identity began in earnest,' and the state acted as a 'supratribes' (Adely, 2012a: 31), aiming to provide security and services through the extension of state institutions, and creating a national history and tradition through the ideological work of these institutions. To this end the regime has worked to construct a uniquely Jordanian identity through the creation of 'tradition', shared history, culture and values – Arab, tribal and Islamic – and by linking that history closely to the Hashemites (Shryock, 1997; Layne, 1994).

One of the most significant characteristics of Jordanian political life is 'its domination by the state'⁹ (Warrick, 2009: 11), as Hind and Terez's stories also revealed. Since independence, the powers of the monarchy have predominated over other constitutional actors in the political sphere. This domination is manifest in the powers of the King, which include the selection of the prime minister and the members of the Upper House of parliament: the royal-appointed prime minister introduces new legislation, which must be approved by the royal-appointed Upper House, and which is subject to ultimate approval (or rejection) by the King. Royal

⁹ As described in chapter one use, I use Connell's (1987) conceptualisation of the state, pointing the attention to the institutionalisation of gender.

domination is also evident in the legal restrictions on the formation of political parties and charitable and social service organisations; in the creation of top-down institutions, as in the case of women's organisations;¹⁰ and in the strategically designed election law.¹¹ Alongside the importance of the monarch, according to Brown (1997), the use of a dual legal system comprising civil law and Islamic law¹² allows the state to legitimise itself politically. On one hand, the Islamic sphere helps to legitimate the state among the 'traditional'¹³ sector of society, controlling dissent and maintaining 'traditional' social forms of civil society. On the other hand, the modern sphere serves as a source of legitimation among domestic democrats and external powers by demonstrating the 'state's secular character, its ability to manage modern forms of government and its good faith in democratisation' (Warrick, 2009: 52).

During the long reign of King Hussein¹⁴ from 1953 to 1999, the state's authoritarian control, including the imposition of decades of martial law,¹⁵ was met with two main challenges in the process of nation-building: the persistence of strong tribal allegiances, and demographic changes that undermined the construction of a national identity. In Jordan, tribes became partners in the foundation of the state (Alon, 2009: 7). Even before the British colonised Transjordan in the 1920s, the country's entire population was organised along tribal lines and adhered to tribal values and customs, and when the independent state was created, tribal support played an active part in the process of state formation. According to Wilson (1987), 'virtually everyone in Transjordan was identified by family, clan and tribal affiliation. This social organisation reflected the territory's low level of urbanisation and marginal relationship to the centre of power... Hence, tribalism in Transjordan was not limited

¹⁰ The role of the state in the development of women's organisations is explained later on in this chapter.

¹¹ The structure and functions of the election law will be explained in chapter three with reference to the introduction of quotas for women.

¹² The civil and criminal codes are heavily influenced by European codes, particularly the French code. *Shari'a* (Islamic law) is codified in the Personal Status Code for Muslims, which regulates issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody.

¹³ In this context, 'traditional' refers to the values linked to the most conservative allegiances and regime loyalists, i.e. the East Bank tribes, as I will shortly explain.

¹⁴ King Hussein bin Talal was King of Jordan from the abdication of his father, King Talal, in 1952, until his death in 1999. He had been the King of Jordan for more than 46 years, during which time he was a prominent actor in various conflicts (the Cold War of 1947–1991, and the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1948 onwards). He won international respect and admiration, but most importantly, he won the respect of people living in Jordan, who are still very attached to his figure, as I experienced while I was in the country.

¹⁵ Martial law banned large public meetings and allowed the authorities to restrict freedom of speech.

to nomads' (57) and Bedouins. The term 'tribe' can function to create distinctions between Jordanian citizens built on dichotomies such as tribal/Palestinian, Bedouin/peasant and Jordanian Jordanian/Palestinian Jordanian, which can simplify the nature of social and political relations in the country¹⁶ (Conte and Walentowitz, 2009; Adely, 2012a); I therefore prefer to follow Alon's definition of the term. In his historical analysis of the role of tribes in the formation of the Jordanian state, Yoav Alon (2009) defines the tribe as 'a group of people distinguished from other groups by notions of shared descent, whether real or imagined' (8). Within this definition, the meaning of tribal loyalties depends on the specific contexts, events and persons involved. Tribes have been and still are 'constituencies' (Alon, 2009: 9) within the state's structure and development. However, tribes need to be considered not only in terms of their interaction with the state, but also from the perspectives of the people who consider themselves part of them, as the accounts of my interviewees will show. In fact, tribes not only play a major political role, but are also considered to embody particular 'values', as the stories of Terez and Amilah have demonstrated and as I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter.

Demographic changes undermined the creation of a national identity as well, connecting Jordan with the development and problems of modern Palestine. The foundation of the State of Israel (1948) led to the forced emigration of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Jordanian population grew by 42%. The Six-Day War of 1967 led to another wave of Palestinians refugees entering the country, and resulted not only in the loss of the Jordanian West Bank to Israeli Occupation Forces (Salibi, 1993: 222), but also to a considerable increase in the proportion of Palestinians within the Jordanian population. The practical considerations and decisions that the Jordanian regime made in regard to the Palestinian issue have sometimes resulted in tensions with other Arab countries (Salibi, 1993). Initially, when some Palestinian guerrilla organisations set up operational bases on the East Bank to launch attacks against Israel, Jordan backed

¹⁶ According to Adely (2012b), the 'reversion to a set of categories and binaries significantly simplifies the realities of Jordanian socio-political life'. The most significant binary is between so-called East Jordanian Jordanians, who are typically defined as 'the tribes', and Palestinian Jordanians, who are 'non-tribal'. Liberal usage of 'tribes' and 'tribalism' to characterise Jordan 'evades the real work of understanding how kin-relations function in people's lives and how this has changed and continues to change'.

these organisations militarily, providing training sites and assistance. The confrontations escalated and led to 10-day civil war known as Black September (1970). After a ceasefire, guerrilla groups were eliminated from the country, but Black September left King Hussein and Jordan isolated from the rest of the Arab world. In fact, as ‘no Arab state at that time felt it could afford to make an enemy of the Palestinian revolution by taking Jordan’s side on the *fedayeen* issue’ (Salibi, 1993: 248), many Arab countries broke off their relations with Jordan: after the Arab summit in Rabat in October 1974, the PLO¹⁷ was recognised as the sole and exclusive legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The consequences of these confrontations were political as well as demographic: indeed, the most salient social division within the Jordanian population is not a religious one, but that between residents of Palestinian and Jordanian origin. This social division comes up particularly during political discussions. On a Saturday morning in early February 2011, I was in Jerash to interview two female candidates with my friend and translator, Vanda. Seham, one of the two female candidates, is a lawyer, and she hosted us in her office in the centre of Jerash. While we were discussing the political stasis of the Jordanian government and the lack of representation of political parties in Jordanian politics, Seham’s husband came into the room. At that point Seham stopped talking, looked at him, turned to Vanda and then turned to him again and said: ‘You can say whatever you want... She [referring to Vanda] is Jordanian’ (Jerash, 5 February 2011). Seham’s comment reflected the vulnerability and discomfort provoked by engaging in certain political discussions with people who do not belong to the same background and do not have the same origins. On another level, Ahlam’s account above reveals the personal, social and political frustration of having to live in a country that it is not her own.

The proportion of Palestinians in the Jordanian population may be as high as 65%; some of them arrived as refugees after 1948 and 1967, and many of them were born and raised in Jordan. The government does not release official estimates on this issue because of political sensitivities, but does acknowledge that 1.4 million Palestinians are registered as refugees with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA); this does not account for all of the Palestinians in the country, as many neither live in refugee camps nor receive UNWRA services (Braizat, 2007).

¹⁷ The Palestine Liberation Organisation, a political and paramilitary organisation, was founded in 1964.

The Palestinian-Jordanian question is closely related to discussions of what it means to be Jordanian and the importance of the concept of national identity. The literature on the issue of citizenship, especially in the Middle East, is vast (e.g. Charrad, 2000; Kandiyoti, 1991a-b; Layne, 1994; Joseph, 2000a-b; Moghadam, 2003; Al-Ali, 2007; Botman, 1999; Hatem, 2000): however, it is not the aim of this research to engage in an in-depth discussion of this issue. In Layne's (1994) study of Jordanian identity, she argues that it is difficult to define the two groups precisely, whether by place, family origin or social characteristics, and that the distinction has enormous social meaning (Layne, 1994: 20). In terms of the impact on Jordanian political culture, the power of the state is widely seen as connected to the maintenance of the East Bank tribes: the army and the civil service are largely drawn from the East Bank Jordanian segment of society, and the monarchy is considered to have a symbiotic relationship with them in which a certain degree of political power and privilege is provided to the 'tribal sector' in exchange for their support (Warrick, 2009: 24). Loyalty to the state and the royal family is often expressed through loyalty to one's tribe and family. As I will discuss in greater detail in chapter three with reference to the impact of tribalism on parliamentary elections, and especially on female candidates, tribes still play a fundamental political role in Jordan, and tribal organisation has adjusted and evolved to become a pillar of society in its dealings with the state. Palestinians are largely excluded from this special relationship with the state. Furthermore, the Jordanian parliament is considered to be a pro-tribal, or non-Palestinian Jordanian, body (Lynch, 1999).¹⁸

Another event that had an impact on Jordanian demography was a direct consequence of the First Gulf War (1990–1991): the influx into Jordan of thousands of Iraqi refugees. Jordan was the only legal country of exit for Iraqis, and although they intended to use it as a country of transit into third countries, they often ended up staying there, as they were unable to attain visas for other countries. After the Iraqi authorities opened up the border with Jordan in May 1991, an estimated 200,000 Iraqis took refuge in Jordan (Chatelard, 2009: 12). By the end of the 1990s, Jordan had learned to live with the consequences of the Gulf War and the ensuing sanctions against Iraq for its politics and economy. But the question of what constitutes a 'true'

¹⁸ On the other hand, it needs to be highlighted that Jordan was the only Arab country to grant certain citizenship's rights to Palestinian refugees after the creation of Israel (Jamjoum, 2013). This split in society is potentially destabilising for Jordan, and the government has partially controlled its effects by forbidding the fomentation of intergroup conflict, creating the crime of 'harming national unity'.

Jordanian, and how this incorporates tribes, Palestinians and Iraqi refugees, is a matter of ongoing discussion among the public (as Hind's account shows with her feelings about being a 'true' Bedouin), in the academic sphere (Shryock, 1997; Alon, 2009; Adely, 2012a), and in the nuances of Jordanian politics. This has also been the case with the impact of the more recent revolutions in Syria and the increasing number of refugees seeking refuge in Jordan.¹⁹

In relation to the discussion on national identity, also the new King²⁰ had to face some challenges that his father had not (Warrick, 2009: 14): he had to work to be perceived as a 'real' Jordanian, since his British mother and his foreign education moderated the legacy of his father. However, his image as a practical professional through his prominent role in the Jordanian military – which ensured the support of East Bankers – and the fact that his wife, Queen Rania, comes from a notable Palestinian family from the West Bank safeguarded his reputation, not only among Jordanians but also among those of Palestinian origin. Faced with continuing turmoil in Israel and Palestine, Abdullah has played only a minor role in the pursuit of regional peace. Moreover, another important factor was the second intifada,²¹ which was supported by the Jordanian people, aided by vocal bodies such as Jordan's Anti-Normalisation Committee, an informal grouping that agitated against any contact – political, social or cultural – with Israel or Israelis. When a coalition of US-led forces invaded Iraq in March 2003, launching the Second Gulf War, Jordan limited its involvement, refusing to open its airspace to coalition aircraft and staying out of the ground war.

International recognition is the sphere in which Abdullah has made the most impact: Jordan has joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO),²² has hosted several meetings of the World Economic Forum and in May 2011 has joined the Gulf

¹⁹ In relation to the Syrian civil war, it is important to highlight the wave of refugees is coming into Jordan across the border in the north. Although it is difficult to get accurate numbers, according to Dawn Chatty (2013) following her visit to the Za'tari camp in the north of the country, 100,000 refugees were estimated to be present in that camp in March 2013, growing at a rate of nearly 5,000 a day. According to UNHCR data (2013), in August 2013, up to 455,000 Syrian refugees were registered in Jordan. This situation is having a drastic impact on Jordan's internal political and social economy. It will also have an impact on the discussion of national identity with reference to the new wave of refugees.

²⁰ On 7 February 1999 King Hussein died, leaving the throne to his son Abdullah, who was crowned in July 1999.

²¹ Also known as the al-Aqsa intifada (2000–2005).

²² On 11 April 2000 Jordan became the 136th member of the WTO.

Cooperation Council (GCC).²³ The regime is often prompt to organise ‘self-congratulatory celebrations’ of issues such as Jordan’s ranking in the Heritage Foundation’s 2010 Economic Freedom Report (Abu-Rish, 2012a: 246). Indices such as ‘Business Freedom’ and ‘Trade Freedom’ measure the ability of capital to move in and out of Jordan to circulate among its economic elites. However, as Abu-Rish (2012a: 246) points out in his recent analysis of the Jordanian uprisings, celebrations of Jordan’s ranking as the 38th freest economy in the world and the fourth freest in the Middle East risk rendering invisible the daily experiences and difficulties of the average Jordanian. In fact, Jordan ranks globally in the bottom 30% in terms of both poverty and unemployment (Abu-Rish, 2012a: 246). As the recent uprisings reveal, demands for political reform and the ending of poverty are central – now more than ever. However, before analysing the impact of the uprisings it is necessary first to discuss Jordan’s relationships with international funders, which were suddenly, but not surprisingly, reinforced after 11 September 2001.

Donor assistance in Jordan

Jordan’s relative stability, its lack of natural resources and its important strategic position in the region have helped to make it one of the major recipients of foreign aid in the region: its main donors are the US and the EU (Echagüe and Michou, 2011: 3). On September 22, 2008, the US and the Jordanian government ‘reached an agreement whereby the United States will provide a total of US\$660 million in annual foreign assistance to Jordan over a five-year period’ (2010–2014) (Sharp, 2013: 9). According to this agreement, the US provides US\$360 million per year in Economic Support Funds (ESF) and US\$300 million per year in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) (Sharp, 2013: 10). In fact, with reference to the fiscal year 2011, the total assistance to Jordan amounted to US\$682.7 million (Echagüe and Michou, 2011: 4), of which less than half was channelled into military and security assistance, while the remainder went into civilian economic assistance, including direct budget support. Within civilian aid, the amount requested for the democracy and governance programme – ‘Governing Justly and Democratically’ – represents roughly 2% of total aid (Echagüe

²³ Also known as the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, it is a political and economic coalition of states bordering the Persian Gulf, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

and Michou, 2011: 4).²⁴

US aid is distributed through the USAID, which then shares resources between its partners locally and internationally. USAID partners are usually US ‘development’ organisations such as the NDI, the IRI and Freedom House,²⁵ which then work with local implementers and focus their activities mainly on ‘good governance, political participation and elections’, according to their websites. Alongside USAID, foreign aid is also implemented through the work of the MEPI and the NED. The MEPI has a budget of US\$40 million for a total of 50 projects in Jordan, providing direct funding through a grant programme for civil society organisations and focusing primarily on women’s empowerment, youth, new media and entrepreneurship.²⁶ The NED was created by US Congress to strengthen democratic institutions around the world, focusing on civic participation, media networks and public-private policy dialogue.

Most of the international organisations operating in Jordan are US-based; however, the EC and the embassies of European states have also increased their interventions in the country through grants to local organisations. European funds allocated to support democratic governance usually represent a small percentage, no more than 3% or 4%, of overall overseas development assistance, and direct budgetary support is far greater than support for civil society. The tendency is towards an effort to maintain stability through negotiated and consensual reform between state institutions and governments. In terms of numbers, overall EU assistance stands at roughly €75 million per year, with €15 million a year dedicated to human rights and good governance projects (EC-Jordan, 2012). The EC channels the money through the bilateral EU-Jordan cooperation programme, which provides direct civil society funding. In addition, the EC allocates around €900,000 each year to support for local organisations through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) programme.²⁷ The EU prefers to work with Jordan-based partners rather than international organisations. However, Echagüe and Michou’s (2011) analysis of the impact of donors in the ‘democratisation’ process in Jordan has shown that the complexity of the application process, especially for EIDHR grants, has ‘contributed to a bias in favour of larger,

²⁴ In March 2013, President Obama pledged to work with Congress to deliver an additional \$200 million in direct budget support to the country to deal with the influx of Syrian refugees (Sharp, 2013: 10), in line with the Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund (MENA IF) established after the uprisings started in the region.

²⁵ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/> [accessed 9 April 2013].

²⁶ MEPI Jordan, (<http://mepi.state.gov/med-region/jordan/> [accessed 9 April 2013]).

²⁷ <http://www.eidhr.eu/> [accessed 1 May 2013].

mostly Amman-based, organisations, focusing the international support on few influential NGOs' (6), rather than supporting smaller and more grassroots organisations. In addition to the EU's bilateral relationship with the Jordanian government, individual states usually work directly with civil society organisations, focusing on media, women's empowerment and NGO capacity-building, as in the case of German, Dutch and Danish support. Finally, financial aid also comes from multilateral donors, such as the UNDP, which mainly works with ministries and other state institutions such as the Lower House of parliament.

As shown, the major financial aid comes from the US: this support started to increase after 1994, when the peace treaty with Israel was ratified. In 1996 Jordan was declared a major non-NATO strategic ally by the US, a designation that makes Jordan 'eligible to receive excess U.S. defense articles, training, and loans of equipment for cooperative research and development'²⁸ (Sharp, 2013: 12). All this attention in terms of the distribution of aid is mostly thanks to Jordan's strategic position in the region, its relative stability, and its status as a key partner in the war on terrorism. In fact, the impact of the attacks of 11 September 2001 is clearly evident in relation to Jordan. Like Afghanistan and Pakistan, in 1998 Jordan did not rank among the top 10 recipients of US foreign aid, but in less than a decade the country became the sixth largest recipient of US economic and military assistance²⁹ (Epstein et al., 2012: 19). The US government's political and development agenda often lies behind democratisation projects, although not all organisations accept funding from the US, as I will outline and discuss in chapter four. The strong relationship that Jordan has with the US in particular has helped to maintain its stability. However, although processes of 'democratisation' and 'internationalisation' seem to have progressed, according to the royal family, at the moment real economic reforms are urgently needed in the country. This frustration has emerged particularly during the recent uprisings in 2011 and 2012.

Did the 'Arab uprisings'³⁰ happen in Jordan?

²⁸ Since 2009, Jordan has received excess U.S. defence equipment valued at approximately \$81.69 million (Sharp, 2013: 12).

²⁹ For fiscal year 2012, Afghanistan is the second largest recipient of US aid (\$2,327million), after Israel (\$3,075million) and followed by Pakistan (\$2,102) (Epstein et al., 2012: 19).

³⁰ I prefer to use the term 'uprisings' rather than 'revolutions' when referring to recent events in the region (i.e. those beginning in December 2010 and January 2011). For a clarification of my use of the term, see the introduction to the thesis.

On the afternoon of Thursday 1 February 2011, I went to meet Hind and Ahlam in a café in the south of Amman. When I arrived they were already there, discussing and chatting in a lively fashion. At the beginning I felt awkward about interrupting them, but when we started talking I felt more comfortable and ‘accepted’. They were excited to meet each other, because they wanted to create their own party: according to them, ‘in order to succeed in parliament we should have the support of a party.’ I stayed in the café with them for a couple of hours, discussing and listening to their stories. It was at the end of our talk, when Ahlam offered to take me home, that they both received a phone call; Hind in particular started getting extremely excited about something. She was talking too fast in Arabic, and it was difficult for me to understand what was going on, but I perceived it was good news because she shook me and congratulated Ahlam as well. When they both finished their phone calls, they turned to me and told me, with huge smiles on their faces: ‘The Prime Minister resigned and the King appointed a new one! I like him, oh I am so happy, and now things will change. He is not corrupt like the previous ones!’ They spread their enthusiasm and energy into the whole place, including to the waiters: their joy was unrestrained.

That day, 1 February 2011, Jordanian Prime Minister Samir Rifa’i resigned following weeks of protests by ‘people in Jordan’³¹ calling on the government to step down, and King Abdullah II tasked Marouf Bakhit to form a new government. That was a gesture by the King to people in Jordan, who had started demonstrating in the streets after the protests in Tunisia and Egypt spread outwards in early 2011.

Although, like Jordan, the countries in which the uprisings evolved, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, were and are governed by authoritarian systems that undermine accountability and civil liberties and promote neoliberal economic policies that are unsuitable to citizens’ basic needs, scholars have considered the protests in Jordan to be different (Abu-Rish, 2012a; Adely, 2012a; Moore, 2012). First, the number of people that took to the streets in Jordan was smaller compared to mass numbers in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia.³² Second, and more

³¹ When I refer to ‘people in Jordan’ throughout the thesis, I am aware of the nuances in the definition of ‘Jordanian identity’. Here I intend people living and working in Jordan, which includes those of Palestinian or Iraqi origin, Bedouins, peasants, East Bank Jordanians, and other people who have immigrated to Jordan.

³² Although it is very difficult, yet impossible, to have exact numbers, people in the streets in Jordan

importantly, protesters' demands in other countries focused on regime change.

In line with these scholars, and from my personal understanding of what was happening in the country during the first months of the uprisings, I grasped two main related aspects. First, the role and position of King Abdullah was not under discussion; as other scholars have suggested (Hudson, 2012; Abu-Rish, 2012a), at the beginning the protests questioned the role of the government, not that of the King. Second, and consequently, because of this faith in the royal family, people in Jordan often told me: 'We are different from other countries in the region – we are not going to end up in a regime change – we are just asking for reforms' (extracts from interviews with women's rights activists and female candidates for parliament, Amman, 2011). As Hudson (2012) points out in his historical outline of the uprisings, protesters in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Saudi Arabia – and I would add Jordan – were saying: 'We celebrate and support the protesters of Tunis and Egypt; they have broken the 'wall of fear' and we would like to see something similar (but not necessarily identical) happen in our countries' (25).

I perceived this faith in the King and the royal family on the afternoon of Saturday 11 June 2011, when by chance I found myself in the middle of a pro-king demonstration in Amman. I was driving back from Petra with some friends, and we ended up in a traffic jam outside Amman. Interestingly, several buses full of young men only – all in their early 20s – were causing the traffic jam. An Iraqi friend who was with me in the car told me that these buses came from the south of Jordan, specifically from the governorate of Karak, a stronghold of conservative tribes and regime loyalists. The demonstration proceeded smoothly, with many young men singing national songs and displaying pictures of the King and his father from the buses and on the streets. The demonstration appeared to me as an outsider to have been entirely organised by external forces. We stayed there for half an hour, and then we managed to leave. That demonstration revealed that the role of the King was still considered central, and was being not challenged by the demonstrators, at least at the beginning of the uprisings.³³ Although that was a clear pro-king event, during other demonstrations the 'fabric and texture of the politics of resistance' (Tripp, 2013: 8) became clearer: the demands were for changes in the regime-appointed government,

never reached the tens of thousands as it occurred in Egypt and Tunisia, counting up to 3,500 protesters, at the beginning of the uprisings (Al-Jazeera staff, 2011).

³³ In November 2012 some protesters demanded regime change in Jordan too. See the end of this section for an analysis.

and for a set of political and economic reforms. But how did the regime address the demands of people in the streets, if indeed it did so? And what were people specifically asking for?

According to Adely's analysis of the uprisings in Jordan (2012b), the combination of a deepening economic crisis and the growing anger over corruption was already tangible in 2008. However, the protests of 2011 'accelerated forces that were already at work in Jordan and had been for some time' (Adely, 2012b). At the beginning of the protests, the demands focused not only on the rise in prices, but especially on people's inability to meet their basic needs thanks to Jordan's neoliberal economic configuration. As Abu-Rish (2012a) points out, the heart of the problem in Jordan's economy is to be found in the 'nexus of poverty, unemployment, and weak purchasing power on the part of the majority of citizens' (245). Neoliberal investments in non-productive sectors provided quick and large revenues, but did so exclusively for the privileged Jordanians who had access to those investments.

The Jordanian regime responded to the first protests in different ways, and I think only with rather 'cosmetic' changes. The regime allowed the demonstrations and worked towards their peaceful resolution. When I participated in one of the first protests in January 2011, walking in the streets of downtown Amman with very few women and lots of young and old men, I was astonished to see police officers, who were there to ensure public order, providing us with bottled water. I personally felt that the decision to order the police to offer bottles of water to demonstrators was a way for the King to let the people know that he was supportive and on their side. During the first months after the uprisings, the regime implemented some measures in response to protesters' demands. However, those measures offered only short-term relief for the rising cost of living for specific social groups, such as through the temporary elimination of fuel taxes, or the increase of 20 Jordanian dinars in monthly salary and pension payments for civilian and military public-sector employees and retirees (Abu-Rish, 2012a; Ryan, 2011).

After the first weeks of protests, the demands started to shift from the social to the political level. In fact, although demonstrations sometimes varied in terms of participants and demands, with protests for greater media and press freedom and against state repression in other Arab countries, the larger demonstrations were for the

democratic reforms that opposition parties³⁴ and civil society groups had been demanding for years (Ryan, 2011). The coalitions were very different, for ethnic, political, generational and geographical reasons. However, both old and new groups and activists agreed on at least some demands for reform. Demonstrators demanded a return to the 1952 Constitution,³⁵ and wanted parliament to be a body that actually legislates rather than merely implements Cabinet initiatives or royal decrees. They were also demanding reform of the one-person one-vote election system through a re-evaluation of the divisions of districts, in order to have elected representatives independent of their tribes. Most importantly, they were all demanding an end to corruption and the establishment of a more independent judiciary to that end, and they were calling for fewer restrictions on the media, press and other publications, and an end to *mukhabarat* interference in public life in general.

During the first demonstrations in January and February 2011, I saw very few women in the streets. I was disappointed at first, but then I thought that with time, more women would start to actively participate. However, during the time I spent in Jordan (until June 2011) I did not see any improvement in this direction. The only women who did participate more actively in the demonstrations were a group connected with the JWU. More women started to demonstrate later in 2011 and in 2012, mostly to demand reform of the Nationality Law and laws on violence against women;³⁶ in some cases the women demonstrating were related to the Islamic Action Front (IAF), Jordan's biggest opposition party.³⁷ By contrast with women's participation, youth activists played a very important role in such demonstrations: often organised as youth or *shabab* groups through Facebook or other social media, these protestors – who pushed for the resignation of the Rifa'i government – came together to form what it is now called the March 24 *shabab* Movement.³⁸ On 24

³⁴ Jordan has approximately 30 political parties. The role of political parties in Jordanian politics will be analysed in the next chapter with reference to the introduction of a quota system for women in parliament.

³⁵ The amendments of the 1952 Constitution have been criticised for sidelining parliament and eroding the government's executive powers, while the monarch has the most of authority.

³⁶ As I will explain later on in the chapter, issues of nationality and violence against women are very sensitive debates within the Jordanian policy-making system.

³⁷ The IAF is the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country. It was founded in 1992, (www.jordanpolitics.org/en/index.php/parties/current-parties/819-the-islamic-action-front-party [accessed 27 May 2013]).

³⁸ From their Facebook page, as translated by Abu-Rish (2012b): 'We are a mixture of free Jordanian young men and women, who are tired of delays and the promise of reform, who see the spread of corruption, the deterioration of the economic situation, the regression of political life, the erasure of freedoms, and the dissolution of the social fabric... We thus declare: That the people want the reform

March 2011 they spent a whole day and night demonstrating for democracy and reform at Ministry of the Interior Circle in Amman. The newer opposition coalition or ‘alternative opposition’³⁹ had organised the protest, but it came to include participants from the more traditional opposition as well (Ryan, 2011: 386). The peaceful demonstrators represented the diversity of Jordan itself: men and some women, young and old, rich and poor, Muslims and Christians, secular and Islamist. They included East Jordanians, Palestinians and Circassians. However, as with most of the 2011 demonstrations, the majority were East Bankers or Transjordanians, who were using very nationalist symbols such as Jordanian flags, nationalist songs and pictures of the King. Although that demonstration was broken up the next morning by armed and angry nationalist youths known as *bultajiyya* (‘thugs’), leaving hundreds injured and one dead, that day is considered to have been an ‘exercise in genuine grassroots democracy’ in Jordan (Ryan, 2011: 386).

The maintenance of the status quo has been a characteristic of the Jordanian politics of the Hashemites, in the past as well as the present (Moore, 2012; Abu-Rish, 2012a). At the beginning of the uprisings, the Jordanian regime seemed to be responding to the protestors’ central demand by sacking Prime Minister Samir al-Rifa’i and providing short-term measures, as described above. Also, in March 2011 the regime established the National Dialogue Committee,⁴⁰ a body created to engage in the public discussion of reform in Jordan. However, I think that the creation of this political committee represents another top-down and regime-sponsored measure that contributes to the maintenance of the status quo through the concentration of power in the polity and the economy, and that it serves as a ‘lynchpin of the regime’s domestic and international campaigns to prove its alleged now-serious approach to reform’ (Abu-Rish, 2012a: 242), without offering anything structurally different from the social, economic and political fabric that was in place before the protests. The maintenance of the status quo is not only in the interests of the Jordanian regime, but,

of the regime. And based on this, we demand: 1- a parliament that represents the people; 2- an elected national government; 3- real constitutional reforms; 4- prosecuting those who are corrupt; 5- reforming the tax system; 6- lifting the security grip; 7- realising national unity’.

³⁹ In Jordan there are two types of opposition: the official opposition, comprised of the legalised opposition parties and professional associations, and the ‘alternative opposition’, which includes the Jordanian Social Left Movement, the Jordanian National Initiative, the National Progressive Current, the National Committee of Military Veterans and the Jordanian Writers Association, in addition to very small groups such as the Democratic Youth Union, the Philosophy Society, the Socialist Thought Forum, the Assembly of Circassian Youth and the Association Against Zionism and Racism (Bustani, 2011).

⁴⁰ Of the committee’s 52 members, only four are women.

as Moore (2012) has argued, it is also a goal for the US, since ‘Jordan is a “safe zone” in a sea of unrest’.

After more than two years since the beginning of the demonstrations, a very active Jordanian blogger has stated that everything is pretty much still the same, and that ‘realistically speaking, 2011 in Jordan has been akin to running wildly through a maze only to find yourself back at the start again with that eerie sense of having spent the past year running in an endless circle’ (Tarawnah, 2012). Since the start of the demonstrations, four prime ministers have resigned, but reforms have not been forthcoming, and people are still demonstrating in the streets. Young people are getting more involved, as Ala, a 22-year-old female activist, told me while discussing her support for the March 24 Movement:

I am really happy about what is happening right now, because young people are becoming more aware. We are realising that we can make a difference, we count, we matter. We have been told many times that we are worthless, we are kids, but now we finally have a voice. I supported the March 24 Movement, their demands and their hopes (Amman, 7 April 2011).

In November 2012, some demonstrators started to demand regime change in Jordan too, with slogans like ‘people want the fall of the regime’ (*al-sha’b yurid isqat al-nizam*).⁴¹ However, not all of the ‘opposition’ was united in the call for the fall of the regime, as in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, which promptly distanced itself from such slogans. As recently pointed out by Bustani (2012), a drastic regime change is unlikely to happen in Jordan, for various reasons. First, the November 2012 protests did not include a huge number of people; this might be related to the complexity and vulnerability of the concept of Jordanian identity. Second, the opposition forces were not united, as the case of the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrates. Third, the brutal development of the Syrian uprisings led the opposition to adopt a ‘new pro-state, anti-chaos rhetoric, which extends to Jordan’ (Bustani, 2012). Fourth and last, because of the delicate role that Jordan plays in regional and international politics, the stability of

⁴¹ For examples of other slogans see Abu-Rish 2012c: ‘*haza al-urdun urdunna wa-al-khayin yab’id ‘anna* (this Jordan is our Jordan, and the traitor should get away from us); *hurriyyeh, hurriyyeh, mish makarim malakiyyah* (freedom, freedom, not royal handouts); *ya bitsalih al-hin, ya bi-tilhaq al-Abidine* (either fix it now, or follow Abidine [Ben Ali])’.

the monarchy will also preserve existing political balances of power. The maintenance of the status quo seems to be the 'safest' way for the regime to retain its role as a buffer state in the region, and to maintain stability inside the country. Internally, the status quo has been maintained through control over civil society organisations and the lack of structural legal reforms, as I will now demonstrate with reference to women's organisations and the promotion of women's rights' in the country.

Women organising in Jordan: an introduction

As emerged from the analysis of women's movements in the region in chapter one, despite some similarities, there are many differences among movements in different countries and contexts (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Ahmed, 1992b; Al-Ali, 2000). State-society relations, political freedoms and restrictions, legal frameworks for civil society associations, economic resources and international links differ greatly from one Middle Eastern country to another (Al-Ali, 2003: 218). There are also many differences between women's organisations and groups within the same country, as in the case of Jordan.

According to Beckwith's argument (2007b) about the 'unique relationship' between women's organisations and the state, women's movements can be defined as 'social movements where women are the major actors and leaders, who make gendered identity claims as the basis for the movement, and who organise explicitly as women' (314). However, in line with Stetson and Mazur (2002), I prefer a slightly less specific definition, as involving 'a broad spectrum of actors and institutions that can potentially represent women's interests, whether they are overtly feminist or not' (3: in Beckwith, 2007b: 333, footnote 5). Although I believe that there is not just one women's movement in Jordan, but rather a multiplicity of groups and organisations that advocate and work for the promotion of women's rights, when I refer to the 'movement' in Jordan I mean to include the plurality of women's organisations. Scholars have tried to classify different women's organisations and groups into precise categories, albeit with the awareness that such categories have to be regarded as fluid and sometimes overlapping (Moghadam, 1997: 32–33). Following, for instance DAWN's (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) classification of women's organisations, scholars have distinguished between

organisations that are service-oriented, affiliated to a political party, worker-based, tied to external funding, grassroots, research-oriented or academic, and also women's coalitions or feminist networks (Sen and Grown, 1987: 89–96). In my analysis of the tensions among selected women's organisations in Jordan in the chapters that follow, I will certainly focus on the type of activities promoted, but I will also shed light on the different approaches used, as well as on their diverse conceptualisations of empowerment. Chapters three and four will present the range of specific activities that women's organisations in Jordan have promoted in order to enhance women's political participation, highlighting the different approaches employed. The attention to women's gender interests and needs reflects the diverse strategies of each organisation and their different conceptualisations and operationalisations of empowerment, which are rooted in each organisation's history, background and relationship to the state. In chapter five I will then focus my analysis on the relationship between women's groups, female candidates, female MPs and 'national machineries'. In this chapter I will introduce the historical development of women's organising in Jordan, stressing the tensions and problems within and between women's organisations, which will be developed throughout the thesis.

Historical background: women's groups

'Women's organisations have different ways of thinking and approaching the woman's cause: there are the leftist, the royal and the governmental ones' (Randa, Amman, 8 March 2011). Randa, a gender expert and women's rights activist whom I met at various conferences in Amman during my fieldwork, reflected on the status of women's organisations in the country. The development of women's organisations in Jordan has been extremely influenced by the role and presence of the state and the royal family.

Women's activism in Jordan started with few charitable organisations at the very beginning of the 20th century, to address issues such as poverty and illiteracy (Husseini, 2010). During the 1940s, dissatisfaction with the status of women increased, and a political consciousness arose following the Israeli war.⁴² Before the

⁴² As described above, the relationship between Israel and Jordan was tense between 1948 and 1994. Here I am particularly referring to the Arab-Israeli war fought between the State of Israel and a military coalition of Arab states and Palestinian Arab forces in 1948–1951.

war, the state did not interfere directly in social work or organisations; it was relatively open to interactions with diverse forms of political power, in what Brand (1998: 36) refers to as the first liberalisation phase in Jordan. The emergence of women's action in other countries in the region such as Egypt, and of transnational movements, also influenced women's activism in Jordan.

Women's activists in Jordan began to play an active role in demonstrations against the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it was then that the 'movement' took shape (Al-Atiyat, 2003: 56). In January 1945 the JWU, in which Terez has been an activist for many years, was established, and the 'movement' became more active in demanding greater political, social, legal and economic rights. One of its main interests was in obtaining women's right to vote, which was granted in 1955 – but only to educated women (Al-Atiyat, 2003: 57; Hussein, 2010: 193). This caused outrage, not only in relation to class discrimination, but also because illiterate men already had their right to vote and run for office. Yet this decision reflected the regime's vision of the inclusion of women in the political system. According to Freij's (2002) analysis of political liberalisation in Jordan, all of the women who received political appointments to positions of power, such as on consultative councils to parliament, came exclusively from prominent families (Freij, 2002: 33). With the exception of the JWU,⁴³ the other smaller women's organisations established in the country between 1951 and 1979 were run by wealthy women, 'who, as a way of filling free time, provided assistance to alleviate poverty or to support orphanages and similar social categories', without doing 'serious work related to the woman's question' (Al-Atiyat, 2003: 56–57). As Freij (2002: 33) argues, the elitist and upper-class nature of women's organisations, especially during the 1970s, contributed to the lack of women's political mobilisation in the country, and I would add that this has also been the case in more recent years, as I will demonstrate throughout the thesis.

The JWU has always been independent of the state, and when authoritarianism increased, it had to overcome many hurdles in order to keep working for women's rights. From the mid 1950s to the late 1980s the power of the authoritarian state became much stronger, negatively affecting the activities of women's groups and other organisations (Warrick, 2009: 144): this led to the closure and banning of the

⁴³ In 1949 Amaly Bisharat, the president of the JWU, presented parliament with a set of political and legal changes in relation to women's status. According to one of my respondents, 'she was very courageous to talk about women's equal rights in the context of inheritance, for instance' (London, 12 December 2012).

JWU. The JWU faced two dissolutions ordered by the government, in 1957 and 1981. In 1957, in an attempt to control and stabilise the country's political situation, the Jordanian regime banned political party activities, and in 1967 parliament was dissolved; subsequently the regime instituted martial law (Brand, 1998). In 1974, just before the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985), Jordanian women received the right to vote and run as candidates in parliamentary elections (Husseini, 2010: 193), without any discrimination related to their level of education. However, they had no opportunity to exercise this right, because all political activity in the country was still suspended. It was not until the restoration of parliamentary life in Jordan in 1989 that the JWU was able to reactivate and regain its voice (Warrick, 2009). In the spirit of the JWU, in the 1970s a group of women activists who dreamt of a society where gender equality and social justice would be the rule for all citizens founded the AWO, a grassroots, non-governmental, non-profit organisation dedicated to making a difference to the lives of women in Jordan.

The 1970s and 1980s marked a shift within the 'movement', from focusing entirely on social welfare to addressing social development concerns; however, political issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were still central. The resumption of parliamentary elections in 1989 and the re-emergence of political parties opened up a new era for women's organisations, and many of the groups that are currently operating have emerged since that date (Warrick, 2009: 144; Al-Atiyat, 2003). Those years also marked the beginning of the state's attempted control over women's organisations and activities through the creation of quasi-governmental/governmental organisations.

The GFJW was founded in 1981, and was the first of this kind of governmental organisations. Mainly women's organisations that focused on charitable work were registered under the GFJW, which operated as a government-sponsored organisation.⁴⁴ The state's power over women's organisations also gave it strict control over the activities of independent groups; this has been seen as an obstacle to the advancement of women's rights in Jordan (Al-Atiyat, 2003). For example, when in the early 1990s the JWU wanted to add to its mission statement the goal of educating women about their political, economic and social rights, the Ministry of the

⁴⁴ The Federation is not based on an individual membership system: women cannot join it unless they are part of a charitable organisation that wants to become a member of the Federation.

Interior ‘asked they omit political rights from the statement’ (Freij, 2002: 34).⁴⁵ Moreover, the regime’s control over women’s groups and activities has been heavily influenced by the role of the royal family through the establishment of the so-called royal NGOs, or as Brand refers to them, RONGOs (Brand, 1998: 171). In 1992 the JNCW, initiated and headed by Princess Basma, was established by cabinet decision. This semi-governmental organisation has gained recognition as the authority on women’s affairs in Jordan’s public sector, while it also represents the Kingdom at regional and international levels in matters pertaining to women (Warrick, 2009: 145). At present, it is an umbrella organisation that tries to coordinate and guide all women’s organisations in the country. In December 1995, Princess Basma also established the JNFW. The JNFW grew out of the mobilisation efforts of the voluntary women’s committees that were set up in 1993 to sensitise local communities to the National Strategy for Women,⁴⁶ which was ratified in 1993 and aimed to improve women’s status (Warrick, 2009: 148). The direct supervision by members of the royal family of the activities and projects of women’s organisations goes hand-in-hand with the limitations and legal restrictions imposed by the state. As Warrick (2009) argues in her research on gender and politics in Jordan, in terms of the development of a free and pluralistic civil society, this type of royal and quasi-governmental NGO ‘is not ideal, as it cooperates with authoritarian power rather than limiting it’ (Warrick, 2009: 151). Although there are as many as 147 other organisations spread all over Jordan working on women’s issues (Dajani, 2008), political activism on behalf of women’s gender interests is led by the few independent, quasi-governmental and royal organisations described above.

⁴⁵ Also, according to one of my respondents who was a member of the JWU: ‘the bargain was over JWU identity, as it used to be called the Union for Women in Jordan, which reflected the Union’s mission to involve women in Jordan regardless of their nationality. The Ministry insisted we changed the name to ‘*Jordanian Women Union*’ in order to reflect the Jordanian identity of the Union... We changed the name, but we kept the political right that every woman, regardless of her nationality, as long as she lives in Jordan, can be a member’ (personal interview, London, 12 December 2012). The JWU has approximately 10,000 members and 10 branches around the country.

⁴⁶ The National Strategy was the result of a series of studies, seminars and meetings between a broad cross-section of men and women from different sectors of society. The strategy aimed at strengthening and implementing women’s rights and gender equality in the fields of legislation, political activity, in the economy and with reference to social, educational and health issues (National Strategy, 1993). This strategy is envisaged as the ‘focal point towards which all national efforts, whatever their orientations and fields of activity, would ultimately lead’ (Al-Atiyat, 2003: 168). It delineates the main areas of attention as improving and enhancing women’s economic status; enhancing women’s status at the legislative level; increasing female participation in politics; increasing awareness of women’s rights and gender issues; and promoting human security and social protection (interview with Asma Khader, JNCW, 28 November 2010).

Organisations' activities and my own experience

Throughout this thesis I will focus on the analysis of three organisations, namely the JNCW, the JNFW and the JWU; for this reason, I aim to introduce my own experiences of visiting each of these organisations. This will be complemented by a brief introduction of the activities offered by each organisation.

It was only on entering their headquarters on my first visits to each organisation that I was able to gain a sense of their diversity. The types of activities they promoted, and the backgrounds of the women involved in their projects, highlighted the differences. When I visited the JNCW I found a professional but not extremely formal atmosphere. The organisation is located on the second floor of the Fund for National Development building in Amman, which is divided into offices and meeting rooms, with pictures of the King, the Queen and Princess Basma everywhere. During my time in Jordan I went there three times, and on each occasion I met different people: first a young project coordinator, who was extremely nice and helpful about letting me get to know the organisation; second the secretary general, Asma Khader, with whom I had a quick but useful meeting; and finally their lawyer, who provided me with good information on laws on discrimination against women in Jordan. Each time I was made very welcome, with tea or coffee, but always in a very distant and professional way. As revealed in the interviews I conducted and on the organisation's website, their mission is to find ways to bolster women's status, proposing 'new policies and legislation to further the cause of women as well as studying existing policies and legislation to ensure they are not discriminated against'.⁴⁷ Their mission resonates with the Jordanian Cabinet's decision of 12 March 1992, which established the organisation to serve as a 'reference body entrusted with drawing up general policies and identifying the priorities of women in Jordan'.⁴⁸ The JNCW was created in response to frequent calls from the United Nations for the establishment of national committees that are concerned with women's issues (Al-Atiyat, 2003: 103). The JNCW's main area of activity is amending legislation that obstructs women's participation in development; enacting new legislation and policies that will guarantee the completion of a legal framework that emphasises women's full participation; and

⁴⁷ http://www.women.jo/en/about.php?cat_id=10&type=0 [accessed 14 April 2013].

⁴⁸ Interview with JNCW project director, 21 November 2010.

creating public awareness regarding the importance of women's roles and their status in the progress of Jordanian society (Al-Atiyat, 2003: 103; interview with JNCW project director, 21 November 2010).

The JNCW oversaw the publication of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in the Official Gazette (2007), and it is currently monitoring Jordan's compliance with it, together with the Human Forum for Women Rights (HFWR). The JNCW is also involved in the implementation and updating of the 'National Strategy for Women' in Jordan and it mainly coordinates research and studies on National Strategy's topics, presenting the results to government institutions and pushing awareness of women's rights at the national level. More recently the JNCW published an evaluative study of the status of gender mainstreaming in various public sector institutions (Suliman, 2010), trying to increase the awareness of gender issues among institutions as well. If lobbying and establishing pressure groups are the main activities that this organisation offers, as I will describe in chapter four with reference to political participation, in a minor way they are also linked to women at the grassroots, offering training activities or addressing issues related to violence against women or the Personal Status Law. In this regard, it is important to underline that the work of the JNCW has contributed to the amendment of a number of discriminatory laws on labour regulation, social security and income tax, as well as of the penal code, the personal status code and the civil status code. These amendments provided some gains for women, such as a paid maternity leave, better pension provision and better access to divorce, although men and women still do not have equal legal status (Warrick, 2009; Hussein, 2010).

My sense of being in a formal environment was confirmed during my attempts to identify the 'typical members' of this organisation. The women represented by the JNCW are usually professionals, members of organisations, and women connected to the state, such as those who work in ministries.

The atmosphere I perceived when I visited the JNFW, was less 'bureaucratic' and friendlier than that at the JNCW. Only four people were working in the office in Amman and, as usual, they welcomed me with tea and coffee. My interactions with my interviewees were less formal than those I had experienced at the JNCW. Pictures of the Queen and Princess Basma were present here too, since the latter is the head of the JNFW's higher council. The main idea behind the JNFW is to enhance women's participation in politics and various other decision-making processes at the local level.

This is intended to further several objectives, such as spreading awareness among women in Jordan about the content of the ‘National Strategy’; raising awareness on health, education, culture, the legislature, economy and politics; and forming pressure groups to influence decision makers (Al-Atiyat, 2003: 105; interview with project director, 18 January 2011). JNFW activities are focused on advocacy, training programmes and awareness-raising projects. As I will depict also in chapter four with reference to activities for political empowerment, this organisation is very keen on raising awareness among people – men and women – concerning women’s status in Jordan, with a particular focus on political participation, women’s health, economic empowerment and violence against women. Although the JNFW is a semi-governmental and royal-supported organisation, their work starts from, and their activities are targeted at, the grassroots. They have 127,000 members (interview with May Abu Alseemen, 18 January 2011) spread all over the country. This high number is possible thanks to the branches they have established in each of the 12 governorates. On a visit to their office in Irbid I found the same atmosphere as I had experienced in Amman. The woman who welcomed me was very specific about the activities organised in the Irbid governorate, but again, attention to the needs of women from the most diverse backgrounds was her priority.

The JWU, which I visited more than once during my time in Jordan, is also very connected with women at the grassroots level. The atmosphere at the JWU is unique. It occupies multiple offices on the same street in the Jabal Hussein area in Amman. One big sign at the top of the main building indicates where the JWU is. However, when I tried to get into the building, I felt as if I were going into somebody’s house. Thanks to two women who were sweeping up outside the entrance and who understood that I was looking for the JWU, I was able to find the right direction. On entering the courtyard I took a look through the ground floor windows and saw many women cooking. But the two women at the entrance had told me that I had to go upstairs. I stopped at the first floor, where I was welcomed into a small office next to a big room where there were many women chatting in a lively way. I was amazed by the happiness and joy I could sense in the environment: although I could not hear what they were saying, the women were laughing and seemed to me to be enjoying themselves. After I had been waiting for a while, one of them showed me around to see how they are organised and how they work. In another room on the same floor, some children were playing and drawing, and I started to wonder what types of

services the organisation offered. Later I discovered that the JWU provides 'Children's Guest House' to care for the children of separated and divorced couples and single mothers: the children I had seen were part of the Guest House programme. This also explained the busy activity in the kitchen I had seen through the window. Inside the building I had the same impression of being in a family home as I had had from the outside. Indeed, every time I visited the JWU, even while I was doing my interviews, the women made me feel like a part of their 'family', with their kindness, their interest in my work and their willingness to give me the information I was looking for.

As previously described, the JWU is an independent organisation, which often demands radical changes in the status of women. It provides a variety of activities, as the manager of the Guest House, a lawyer, and a psychologist all enthusiastically explained to me:

We have some permanent ongoing activities, such as a hotline for legal, social and psychological advice for women, the Children's Guest House, and a women's shelter to provide some support to women who may be being abused and who are victims of violence (Amman, 8 December 2010).

Indeed, the JWU is one of the most prominent organisations in the field of violence against women (Warrick, 2009), together with the Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI).⁴⁹ The direct help the JWU offers to women is the first thing that strikes a visitor to the organisation, especially if one stays in the main building. On another visit I was invited to another building, still on the same street, to meet the director, Nadia Shamrouk. Although the atmosphere in this office too was very welcoming and friendly, I could sense that the work on this side of the building was more focused on administrative and organisational activities; the space was structured more like an office, with desks, computers and meeting rooms. The JWU is very involved in lobbying activities, implementing national campaigns, addressing issues such as the Nationality Law, the passport law, family law, divorce law and election law. Political awareness is also central to the JWU's approach, and this reflects the organisation's

⁴⁹ The Sisterhood Is Global Institute/Jordan was established in 1998 in Amman by a group of Jordanian women, and is registered as a non-governmental, non-profit Jordanian organisation.

desire to promote change coming from women in cities, villages and camps, dealing with political participation, economic empowerment and health issues. The JWU is very effective in providing services for women at the grassroots level, and also in advocating and lobbying for women's rights and gender justice, as I will continue to depict throughout the thesis.

The JNCW, the JNFW and the JWU work towards women's rights promotion following different agendas. However, they are not the only bodies that attempt to advocate gender justice in the country: there are also other top-down institutions called national machineries.

National gender machineries

Goetz and Hassim (2003) argue that not only does the nature of the state affect the possibilities of policy change for women's empowerment, but the power of gender equality advocates within civil society is also an important factor. In addition, I would include the influence of the international community and of international donors, agreements and conferences on women's rights and gender justice as factors that have pushed many states to integrate gender and women's rights into their policies and structures. The institutionalisation of women's gender interests at the national level has been the concern of both women's movements and IOs, both globally and with reference to the Middle East. As discussed in chapter one, when gender mainstreaming⁵⁰ emerged as a strategy for the diffusion of gender interests across state and local institutions, many countries started to incorporate a gender analysis into their policymaking processes. After the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the BPFA, the focus on mainstreaming gender through 'national machineries' for the advancement of women was strengthened. The BPFA outlined three strategic objectives in this regard: to create or strengthen national machineries and other government bodies; to integrate gender perspectives into legislation, public policies, programmes and projects; and to generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation (Wordsworth, 2008: 10).

⁵⁰ Gender mainstreaming, understood as a process of gendered democratisation, is discussed in chapter one, together with the implications of its transformative agenda.

The benefits and shortcomings of national machineries have been widely debated among feminist scholars (Goetz, 1998; Rai, 2008; Eveline and Bacchi, 2010), particularly in relation to two main questions. First, are national machineries as state institutions the most appropriate instruments for furthering women's gender interests? Second, do these institutions command the necessary resources to be able to promote gender interests?

The representation of gender interests is a very multifaceted, complex and nuanced process, which needs to take into considerations the roles of all the actors involved. For this reason, the question of engagement with the state and state institutions in the process of representing gender interests should not be seen in terms of binary oppositions. We need to consider the broader picture of the mobilisation of gender interests and their articulation within the space of women's groups, organisations and civil society at large. We also need to understand the reasons, whether political and/or connected to international demands, behind the establishment of such 'national machinery', bearing in mind that all national machineries are embedded in specific socio-economic and political contexts. Although, as Rai (2008) suggests, comparisons between national machineries in different contexts are not always useful, some elements are critical for all. First, whether the machinery is located at a higher or lower level within the decision-making hierarchy might have an influence on its position of authority and/or access to resources. There is a general consensus that machineries at the highest possible level are potentially the most powerful (Wordsworth, 2008: 15), and that such positions enhance their economic and political advantages (Rai, 2008: 78). Second, the vexed question of the relationship between mandate and functional responsibility may lead to the risk that some national machineries will focus exclusively on their 'role as policy advisers and catalysts for gender mainstreaming, leaving the actual implementation of policies, programmes and projects to other bodies' (Rai, 2008: 81). This aspect is closely linked to the notorious lack of human and financial resources within these institutions – a problem that has its roots in government institutions' lack of political will to support them. A more explicit political will, together with a stronger relationship between national machineries and civil society, would benefit the advancement of those machineries.

Although these reflections may work on a theoretical level, it will be important to understand how these problems, situations and relationships translate into practice, bearing in mind the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming outlined in

chapter one. Indeed, the extent to which such ‘machineries’ employ a transformative approach will be at the centre of my analysis in chapter five, together with those ‘machineries’ internal limitations and obstacles, with specific reference to Jordan.

The institutionalisation of gender at the national level in Jordan started at the end of 1997, when JNCW, as an umbrella organisation, suggested the establishment of ‘gender focal points’ within ministries and public institutions in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC). MoPIC plays a leading role among other ministries and government institutions: no ministry, party or government department can implement any development project without its approval.⁵¹ This monitoring is not limited to financial and administrative matters, but also extends to gender-related tasks (Suliman, 2010). The main goal of the establishment of focal points was to create a ‘gender network’ within public institutions to work together towards a national strategy, which was to be included in the national agenda for economic and social development for the years 1999–2003, in order to guarantee both horizontal and vertical collaboration. MoPIC established a Gender Unit in 2005. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Social and Political Development, established a Gender Section at the end of 2010. The Ministry of Labour created a ‘women’s department’, and the Ministry of Education, which had had a ‘gender group’ since 2006, created a gender unit at the end of 2010. More recently, in May 2012, a Ministry for Women’s Affairs was also established.

The creation and development of women’s organisations and national machineries has been part of Jordan’s ‘democratisation’ process to include women’s cause in national and regional political discourse. Whether the attention to women’s rights has been just a façade strategy of the government and the royal family is a question to be analysed with reference to the status of women’s rights and the development of women’s empowerment projects in the country.

The promotion of women’s rights, or the status quo?

Whenever I walked down the hill where I lived in the Tla’ Al‘Ali area next to the University of Jordan, on my way to the market to buy food, cars would often slow down and the men inside would look at me, smile, and shout something I could never

⁵¹ According to Ministry Law No. 68 of 1971.

understand but could easily imagine. A very ‘easy’ approach was also common in taxis when I was by myself, but as soon as the taxi drivers heard I was married, they would stop ‘flirting’ and start talking about the traffic or tourist sites to visit in Jordan. I used to receive such ‘approaches’ on the university campus too, which I visited quite often during my time in Jordan. At first I thought that this attitude was primarily because I was a young, Western, blonde woman who often went around by herself. I was wrong. When I confessed to some of my female Jordanian friends and interviewees that I was bothered by these glances, verbal appraisals and insults, they all shared my annoyance, since these things happened to them too. When I heard that in the autumn semester of 2011, Professor Quawas at the University of Jordan had assisted and advised a group of students in her feminist theory class to make a short video about the sexual harassment experienced by female students on campus, and that the video had been posted on YouTube, I was extremely pleased about the project.⁵² When in September 2012 I read that Professor Quawas had been dismissed from her post by a decision of the university’s board of trustees, I felt disappointed. The film was considered harmful to the university’s reputation; but no one expressed any concern about the degradation of the learning environment at the university caused by widespread sexual harassment. Reflecting on these events, I thought they were perfectly in line with the frustrating behaviour of ‘keeping the façade clean’ that I had encountered during my research, especially with reference to women’s empowerment projects, as I will discuss throughout the thesis.

The public role that Queen Rania has acquired as the ‘promoter’ of women’s rights, especially in relation to Europe and the US, and the image of women’s rights in Jordan that the King wants to project by publicising the introduction of specific measures that are well received in the West – such as the introduction of gender quotas for municipal and parliamentary elections – have helped to create the impression that Jordan is interested in women’s rights, both regionally and internationally. However, when we dig deeper and analyse the status of women’s rights, women in Jordan still face many contradictions and forms of discrimination, as Terez pointed out during our discussion: ‘There is a need to amend those laws that affect the daily life of women, such as issues like polygamy, heritage and nationality’ (Amman, 17 April, 2011).

⁵² The video has now been removed from the Internet.

Jordan has ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1974 and the CEDAW in 1990 – albeit with some very significant reservations⁵³ – as well as the ILO’s Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration in 1966 and Convention 111 on Discrimination in 1963. Jordan promulgated its own Constitution in 1952, but Article 6 is heavily criticised by women’s organisations as it currently stands: ‘Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion.’⁵⁴ Women’s groups are demanding a constitutional amendment to incorporate equality on the basis of gender in Article 6 of the Constitution.

One of the most widely debated forms of discrimination against women in the context of women’s rights in Jordan refers to the Nationality Law.⁵⁵ Some women’s activists, and in particular independent women’s organisations such as the JWU, are demanding an amendment of this law, which at the moment does not allow Jordanian mothers to pass on their citizenship to their children if they are married to a non-Jordanian man. Of course, the reverse situation – a Jordanian man who marries a foreigner – is provided for in the law, and the father can pass on his citizenship to his children. The gender restrictions on full citizenship rights are also confirmed by the reservations made by the Jordanian government in its ratification of CEDAW (Nasser, 2010) with reference to Article 9 on the nationality of children.⁵⁶ Jordan’s reservations indicate that a masculinity-based nationalism reflects the ‘underpinnings of a paternally based citizenship’ (Amawi, 2000: 163). Although at the time of the reservations, the justification given for the denial of citizenship was its possible conflict with the provisions of *shari‘a* law (Amawi, 2000: 163), the Nationality Law is a very political issue in Jordan. The government has more than once announced that it is examining the possibility of amending articles in the Nationality Law, but this has never happened (Nasser, 2010). In 2003, for instance, the then interior minister Samir Habashneh announced that the government was not going to amend the Nationality

⁵³ Article 9, paragraph 2 (nationality of children); Article 15, paragraph 4 (a wife’s residence is with her husband); Article 16, paragraph (1) (c), relating to the rights arising upon the dissolution of marriage with regard to maintenance and compensation; Article 16, paragraph (1) (d) and (g), (CEDAW Reservations, n.d.).

⁵⁴ Article 6, paragraph 1 of the Jordanian Constitution.

⁵⁵ Nationality Law No. 6 of 1954.

⁵⁶ Article 9, paragraph 2, CEDAW: ‘state parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.’

Law for Jordanian women who married Palestinians until a settlement had been reached in the Palestinian conflict, saying:

This issue is no longer possible because it means granting citizenship to around half-a-million Palestinians in Jordan. There are about 60,000 Jordanian women married to Palestinians and the average number of children in each of these families is around 6.5. This means giving the Jordanian citizenship to around 500,000 Palestinians (Husseini, 2007).

The discrimination embodied in the Nationality Law coincides with the desire to maintain the status quo of patriarchal structures, both within the family and within the state. The maintenance of the status quo is also evident in other official dispositions, such as the Personal Status Law.⁵⁷

In the Middle East, the personal status code is often at the centre of debates concerning the ‘modernisation’ and ‘democratisation’ of countries, and serves as an occasion for the most ‘explicit and politicized debates about women’ (Adely, 2012a: 53). These laws govern such issues as marriage and divorce, the custody of children, the rights of husbands and wives, and polygamy. Attempts to change these laws are the source of debates about Islam and what is religiously acceptable, about authenticity and culture, about human rights, and about the nature of a country’s polity (Adely, 2012a). In Jordan, the Personal Status Law continues to designate women as dependents. In fact, through the legal provisions of *wilaya* (guardianship)⁵⁸ a woman is placed under the guardianship of a male relative (*wali*) until she becomes 30 years old; thus *wilaya* provisions define women as legal minors and dependent subjects. As Jabiri (2013) has recently argued in her analysis of guardianship regulations in Jordan, ‘the legal provisions of *wilaya* over women do not only restrict women’s scope of activity but, more importantly, represent a comprehensive, dynamic and multi-stranded discourse that reproduces hegemonic notions of normative femininity and masculinity’.

⁵⁷ Personal Status Law No. 61 of 1976.

⁵⁸ There are two types of guardianship provisions: one pertains specifically to women’s choice of marriage partners, and the other, applies in general terms (Jabiri, 2013).

Women's groups have attempted to challenge the designation of women as dependents, not with specific reference to *wilaya*, but, for instance, in relation to divorce provisions. The most common form of divorce, available only to men, is *talaq* (arbitrary divorce), which permits a husband to divorce his wife without providing any legal reason. A woman seeking a divorce may file for a judicial divorce at the *shari'a* court, 'but only if she can cite one of a limited number of valid reasons, which require strong evidence and witness testimony' (Hussein, 2010: 202). In 2001, women's groups, with the support of Princess Basma, lobbied for the passage of a law on another form of 'divorce, *khul'*, meeting with parliamentarians and community religious leaders' (Clark, 2006: 549);⁵⁹ the amendment was passed as a temporary law after parliament was dissolved in 2001. However, when parliament was reconvened in 2003, the temporary law was overturned, thereby reflecting the tribal and conservative nature of this institution.

Together with this temporary law, an amendment to Article 340 of the Penal Code,⁶⁰ which regulates so-called honour crimes, was also rejected by the reconvened parliament. Women's groups have been lobbying for a revision of the legislation on 'honour' crimes, but the masculine-based and conservative ideology of most politicians, including female ones, has made the process extremely difficult. Although there are many differences between women's organisations, violence against women and 'honour' crimes have been and remain at the centre of many women's groups' concerns.⁶¹ Violence against women is not limited to domestic violence, but has been used as a method for the rejection of female candidates in very conservative tribes, as the case of Amilah demonstrated above. In regard to 'honour' crimes, officially it is estimated that there are around 20 'honour' killings in Jordan each year (Husseini, 2010: 197). However, it is very difficult to get official numbers, since usually these crimes are not reported. These crimes consist in the killing of a member of the family, usually a woman, by another member of the family in the belief that the person has dishonoured the family (Husseini, 2010). Adultery, premarital relationships (which

⁵⁹ It is a form of divorce permitted by *shari'a* law 'in which the wife can unilaterally end the marriage by returning her dowry and giving up all her rights to future financial maintenance' (Husseini, 2010: 202).

⁶⁰ Penal Code No.16 of 1960.

⁶¹ In this regard, it is important to mention the excellent job that the JWU and the Sisterhood is Global Institute are doing in terms of promoting awareness of domestic violence and abuse, and providing legal and physical protection to women who have been victims of violence.

may or may not include sexual relations), rape, and falling in love with an ‘inappropriate’ person can all constitute violations of family honour (Dawany, 2009).

Although there are many differences within and between women’s organisations’ agendas and visions, the women’s ‘movement’ in Jordan campaigns and lobbies to end discrimination against women. However, scholars have criticised the activities of women’s organisations for taking a moderate approach that achieves small changes over time and does not make radical demands or challenges to the political order (Warrick, 2009: 143). Women’s activists obtained the introduction of a gender quota-system for both parliamentary and municipal elections, and legal equality on issues such as freedom of movement, healthcare, education and employment. However, women still face discrimination in statutes such as family laws, the Nationality Law, and laws related to domestic violence, issues that are closely connected to the political and social order of the country. The lack of radical demands that might transform power relations and address gender hierarchies within society have led the women’s ‘movement’ to be considered too bourgeois and too state-controlled, not only by scholars (Warrick, 2009; Brand, 1998), but also by the women I interviewed, who do not identify themselves with the movement, as I will analyse in the final chapter of the thesis.

Conclusions

Hind, Terez, Ahlam and Amilah represent four very different stories from among the women who wanted to share their experiences and concerns as female candidates with me. Each of their stories has been connected to diverse aspects of Jordan’s socio-political fabric. Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated how the intrusion and role of the regime in the daily lives of ‘people in Jordan’ has been extremely evident in the past, and it is still very relevant in the present. The politics of superficial and quick solutions, as in the case of the aftermath of the recent uprisings, is closely connected with the maintenance of the delicate balance of power between different forces within the regime. Through the maintenance of this status quo the regime has been able to preserve the ‘stability’ that wins international support and trust. But as long as the idea of keeping the ‘façade clean’, as in the case of Professor Quawas’ dismissal, will continue to be the preferred politics, it will be difficult for social

change to happen – and this will be negatively reflected in the status of women's rights.

Indeed, this system allows the state to have direct control over political order. On the one hand, it manages political participation by organising election laws, selecting candidates and controlling civil society and women's organisations. On the other hand, the state also dominates dissent, by restricting free speech, not granting basic rights to women, and limiting the work of independent activist groups, thus reproducing and maintaining gender regimes. Unless there is a political will to change gender power relations in society (Larson, 2008), women will continue to be treated as second-class citizens, and gender will continue to be considered an 'add-on' to social policies rather than a fundamental component of democracy.

By analysing women's participation in parliament, the introduction of quotas and the role of international and local organisations in 'empowering' women in politics in the following chapters, I aim to provide a deeper analysis of the relationships between different actors in the promotion of women's rights. In particular I aim to assess the consequences of these dynamics for the promotion of women's rights in the context of increasing, yet questioned, reliance both on the regime and on international support.

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN IN POLITICS: DISCUSSING THE INTRODUCTION OF GENDER QUOTAS

Introduction

On 23 January 2013 the third parliamentary elections in six years were held in Jordan (2007, 2010, 2013). The 2013 elections came after the so-called Arab uprisings had spread throughout the region, including in Jordan, as described in chapters one and two. Analysts and scholars often argue that the uprisings in Jordan actually started before January 2011 (among others Ryan, 2010; Tell, 2013) because of economic and social dissatisfaction. One of the King's political strategies to try to maintain stability involved the dissolution of parliament and a consequent call for new elections. This occurred not only with the last parliamentary elections, but also earlier: following public dissatisfaction with the parliament that was elected in 2007, King Abdullah dissolved it in November 2009 and called for early elections then too. Elections were held on 9 November 2010: as I explained in my introduction, my case study focuses primarily on these 2010 parliamentary elections. The extent to which the calls for new elections provided political, economic and social stability will require further study and elaboration.

One of the main debates raised before the 2010 and 2013 elections concerned the amendments to the Constitution and the provisions of election law. Promulgated in 1947, the first Constitution of the newly independent Kingdom of Jordan granted the King exceptional powers. Legislative authority is vested in the bicameral National Assembly (*Majlis al-Umma*) and the King. The legislature is made up of an Upper House or Senate (*Majlis al-A'yan*), whose members¹ are appointed by the King, and a Lower House (*Majlis al-Nuwab*), whose members² are elected. A new Constitution, adopted in 1952, strengthened the power of the legislative and judicial authorities and

¹ In the current Senate there are 55 members. Members must be former public officials or otherwise notable persons, and at least 40 years of age. Members serve for a four-year term (article 64 of the Jordanian Constitution).

² The current Lower House comprises 150 members. A member must be at least 30 years of age (Article 70, Jordanian Constitution).

introduced some controls on the executive, while stipulating a large number of basic freedoms and rights for individuals (Lucas, 2005: 107), at least on paper.³ In 1957 and until 1989, all political parties were banned. The period up to 1993 saw great political turmoil due to the conflicts in the region,⁴ with many amendments to the Constitution, the restoration of absolute power to the executive authority, the suspension or delay of elections, and repeated amendments to election law.

Prior to the 1993 parliamentary elections, the government issued a new amended version of the election law and introduced the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system, also known as the one-person one-vote system. This replaced earlier provisions, which had given voters the right to select a number of candidates equal to or less than the number of seats in a given district, with a new system that allowed them to vote for only one candidate (Lucas, 2005). The law for the 2010 elections still used the SNTV system, and although it was modified in June 2012, it has a number of weak points, as I will discuss in this chapter.

Jordan has approximately 30 political parties, but these tend to be largely irrelevant, both in electoral politics and in the mobilisation of public opinion: the exception is the Islamic Action Front (IAF), which boycotted the 2010 and 2013 elections. The weakness of political parties in Jordan can be seen largely as a result of their having been banned for about 30 years, but is also partly because, at the time of the founding of the Jordanian Kingdom, the tribe⁵ was the most important political and social organisation and played an important role in the formation of the new state (Antoun, 2000). In the 1950s, the spread of pan-Arab nationalism reduced the role of tribes, especially regarding mass political action, but during the long interval of martial law their role resurfaced. In the absence of political parties, the state dealt directly with society through its various segments, particularly the tribes. This situation meant that parties were not necessarily the channel through which people reached the authorities as providers of services or the means to solve problems.

³ As Articles 26 and 27 of the Constitution state: (26) 'The Executive Power shall be vested in the King, who shall exercise his powers through his Ministers in accordance with the provisions of the present Constitution.' (27) 'The Judicial Power shall be exercised by the courts of law in their varying types and degrees. All judgments shall be given in accordance with the law and pronounced in the name of the King.' The Constitution provides some rights, such as the guarantee of personal freedom (Article 7) or compulsory elementary education (Article 20), which are not as problematic as others. For instance, Article 6 establishes that there should be no discrimination among Jordanians as regards their rights and duties on the grounds of race, language or religion (Article 6), without including or referring to gender.

⁴ See chapter two for more details.

⁵ For a definition of this term, refer to chapter two.

Whereas tribal organisation adjusted and evolved to become a pillar of society in its dealings with the state, the parties were not allowed to do this and were left outside of the process of political development. Today various segments of society do not see parties as a means to achieve their goals (Antoun, 2000: 460).

This socio-political development within the country has produced various types of practice connected with the election process – a type of election ‘culture’ – during previous and recent elections (in 1989, 1993, 1997, 2003, 2007, 2010 and 2013). During the 1950s, candidates came mostly from the ranks of political or party activists, and parties enjoyed a reasonable degree of freedom. Today a large number of candidates for election to parliament operate on a tribal or individual, independent basis. This situation may explain the very large number of candidates,⁶ some of whom gain only a few dozen or a few hundred votes, raising questions about whether their standing for election is justified. This also explains why the Jordanian parliament functions not as a representational system, but as a clientelist one. Indeed, parliament acts as a patronage institution, in which a strong opposition is lacking and tribal leaders, urban elites and people loyal to the regime constitute the majority of members – a situation that Liddell (2009), with reference to the functions of the Moroccan parliament, has defined as ‘mechanisms of elite circulation and regime support’ (81).

Hence within this system, political parties, women and other minorities that are not part of royal supporters’ groups are under-represented. In regard to women’s representation, a reserved-seats quota system was introduced in 2003, when six seats were reserved for women. In 2010 the number of seats increased to 12, out of a total of 120 members of parliament; and in 2013 the reserved-seats quota increased to 15, out of a total of 150 seats. Nowadays, the representation of women in Jordan’s parliament is very low: according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union ranking, Jordan is 103rd out of 190 countries in terms of the percentage of women in parliament (IPU data, 2013a). But to what extent does numerical and formal representation matter when parliament functions on a clientelist basis? Considering the Jordanian parliament within the framework of a patronage and clientelist system, I believe it is necessary to provide a more accurate analysis of the consequences of women’s increased political participation at the national level.

⁶ The number of candidates registered for the 2010 election was 763. In 2013 the number of seats in the Lower House increased from 120 to 150, and there were approximately 1,400 candidates.

In this chapter I aim to discuss the adoption of affirmative action measures in the context of the Jordanian parliament in relation to broader theoretical debates on substantive and descriptive representation. Specifically, I aim to contribute to existing academic debates on gender quotas, both globally and regionally, with my empirical case study, i.e. the adoption of reserved seats for women in the 2010 Jordanian parliament. Why and to what ends (politico-socio-cultural) was the quota system introduced in Jordan? With this question in mind, I am going to explain and analyse the main actors behind the adoption of gender quotas in Jordan, which were mainly the government, women's groups and the international community. Drawing on the experiences of female candidates for the 2010 parliamentary elections, I will ask how different material conditions and circumstances intersected with each other and influenced the advancement of women's political participation in Jordan.

Substantive representation and quotas

One of the most important texts on women and quotas is Pitkin's *The Concept of Representation* (1967), in which she underlines the distinction between representation as 'standing for' and representation as 'acting for'. In her view it is more important to focus on what representatives do, rather than on who they are. Thus Pitkin (1967) considers political representation in a substantive way, defining it as 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (209). However, several scholars have made criticisms of Pitkin's thesis. Some stress the need to pay attention to the numerical under-representation of women in politics; they argue that justice and fairness demand that women should be present in elected political institutions (Phillips, 1995), and they therefore propose affirmative action measures such as the adoption of quotas. Others underline the relationship between the descriptive and substantive components of representation: being female – 'standing for' – is an enabling condition for the substantive representation of women – 'acting for', and also includes the involvement of women and women's concerns in policymaking (Waylen, 2008: 518). Indeed, according to Mansbridge (1999), women in politics are more likely to act for women than men are, although there is no guarantee that this will happen and women should not be conceived as a homogeneous group; the potential to have one's most important substantive interests represented rests with those who are also one's descriptive representatives. In contrast, Young (2010) asserts

that representation should be considered in terms of women's social perspectives. These derive from group members' being 'similarly positioned' and 'attuned to particular kinds of social meanings' (198).

Discussions around the increase of women in politics are frequently linked to what have been defined as affirmative action measures, such as gender quotas.⁷ Anne Phillips (1998) distinguishes three types of argument for increasing women's presence in politics to which quota supporters appeal. The first is the so-called justice argument, which argues that since women constitute half the population, 'their relative absence from spheres of power and influence is unfair and ought to be rectified for reasons of justice alone' (Phillips, 1998 cited in Krook, 2006: 14). Women's presence is considered an end in itself: the equal representation of women and men in political office is a parameter of social justice. The weakness of this argument, I believe, is that the outcomes of the greater presence of women in office are not taken into consideration. This argument does not take into consideration any analysis of what a woman does once she enters politics, whether in favour of or against women's rights. This is particularly problematic in countries where patronage, clientelism and tribal relationships are at the core of the social fabric, as is the case for most countries in the Middle East, including Jordan.

Indeed, the second argument has been defined as the 'women's interests argument', which claims that female representatives are more likely to promote issues of concern to women, just because they are women. As explained in chapter one, I adhere to a definition of interests that refers to 'gender interests',⁸ since interests are constituted in relation to historical and political contexts, and are not only based on gender dynamics. Since gender as an analytical tool intersects with other categories such as class, race, ethnicity, tribal relationships and place of residence, female as well as male representatives may focus on their class's interests, or on their specific

⁷ Quotas are affirmative action measures that establish a percentage or number for the representation of a specific group (in this case women), most often in the form of a minimum requirement (for instance, 20% 30% 40% or 50%). Gender quotas may also be constructed in terms of a maximum-minimum representation for both sexes (for instance, no more than 60% and no less than 40% for each sex) (Dahlerup, 2007: 78). The two most common types of electoral quotas are 'candidate quotas', in which a definite percentage of the candidates on the lists of individual parties in a constituency must be women, or 'reserved-seats quotas', as in the case of Jordan, in which there is a set number of seats in parliament assigned to women, according to district divisions. For a broader look at the different systems and subsystems in the world of gender quotas, see Dahlerup (2006, 2007).

⁸ As explained in greater detail in chapter one, women's interests are distinct from women's gender interests (Molyneux, 1985). Women's gender interests have to be understood not in an essentialist way, but as historically and culturally constituted, as well as politically and discursively constructed.

communities', parties' and tribes' interests; they will not exclusively focus on their gender interests. For these reasons, I think it may be limiting to focus attention only on the representation of women's interests; I believe it will be necessary to address the issue of the representation of interests by taking into consideration the intersections between different identities, such as tribal relationships, education or place of residence.

Lastly, the 'revitalised democracy argument' claims that incorporating members of 'historically marginalised groups into politics' will help to challenge negative stereotypes about their 'unsuitability for political office, promoting more democratic outcomes overall' (Krook, 2006: 14). However, although a higher presence of women in official politics might serve to rank that particular country as 'more democratic' according to international standards, will it be enough simply to 'add women and stir' in order to have marginalised groups' interests represented in national institutions such as parliament?

Whether the focus is on the gender dimension or on class or tribal relations, elected candidates will represent selected groups' interests. According to Mansbridge (1999), having a better representation of marginalised groups in political institutions will increase 'the polity's *de facto* legitimacy in contexts of past discrimination' (628). Since these groups' members share a legacy of discrimination, it is further assumed that this shared perspective will permit greater knowledge about the group's interests, and at the same time will give representatives from the group the will to pursue those interests more vigorously (Phillips 1998; Swers 2002). However, according to Yuval-Davis's critique of identity politics (2007), the lack of differentiation between individual and collective identity helps to 'mask power relations within identity groupings and to promote particular constructions of boundaries' as well as of the meanings of categories such as women or blacks (4). In fact, within any specific group there will be many differences based on a 'whole range of social locations', such as class, gender, sexuality and so forth, and there might be a shift from identity politics towards what Yuval-Davis calls 'transversal politics'⁹ (Yuval-Davis, 1999:

⁹ Although Yuval-Davis has now moved away from the notion of transversal politics, the concept refers to the recognition of differential power positions among participants in a dialogue, encompassing these differences with equal respect and recognition for each participant (Yuval-Davis, 1999: 98). According to Yuval-Davis, transversal politics is based partly on standpoint epistemology, which recognises that from each positioning the world is seen differently. By recognising the encompassing of difference by equality, transversal politics is also based on a conceptual and political differentiation between positioning, identity and values (Yuval-Davis, 1999).

94).

Thus the positionings, the markers of the identities and values of each representative, are central to her or his ability to speak up for her/his group's interests. However, it is very complicated and difficult to evaluate the impact of the increased participation of any group (in this case women). In the context of the effectiveness of women's representation, women often face double standards: female politicians are readily accused of lacking knowledge and education, and at the same time they are criticised for only representing a small group of educated elite women (Dahlerup, 2006: 14). Although this may be true for women, I think it is the same for men. Moreover, female politicians are often accused of being tokens within their clans, families and parties. The concept of tokenism reinforces arguments by the opponents of quotas, who argue that quotas primarily benefit elite women and do nothing to address the concerns of the average woman. This is particularly true in cases where politics are dominated by party elites, and where lines of patronage and clientelism are deeply entrenched, as is the case in most Middle Eastern countries: these elites might use quotas to tighten their control over the selection of candidates (Baldez, 2004) while also nominating elite women, especially women who are linked through family relationships to male party leaders (Nanivadekar, 2006).

Also, especially in very conservative contexts, there is the risk that the elite, party or tribe's interests will heavily collide with women's rights agendas. This has been the case in countries such as Jordan and Somalia, where tribal traditions have been considered a barrier to women's empowerment and political participation (Abou-Zeid, 2006: 179). In 2000, for instance, women's seats in the Somali Transitional National Assembly were allocated so that a total of five women would represent each major clan; women were therefore entering politics as clans' representatives. In this case, the presence of women in politics does not equate with the representation of gender interests. Moreover, as Al-Ali and Pratt (2009b) have demonstrated in the case of Iraq, the women's movement was very much in favour of the introduction of a women's quota, campaigning for at least a 40% representation; Iraqi women activists achieved a compromise on a 25% target for women's participation in elected assemblies under the Transitional Administrative Law and the permanent constitution (131). However, Al-Ali and Pratt (2009b) comment that, 'ironically', the women's quota helped to push through a conservative agenda on women's rights, since 'most of the women elected to parliament were linked to Shi'i political parties and

supported the implementation of shari'a,' abolishing the 'relatively progressive personal status code' (135). Referring to the case of gender quotas in Tunisia before the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, Goulding (2009) also shows that women who were encouraged to become politically active were primarily those who subscribed to the 'state-sponsored' brand of feminism promoted by the Ben Ali regime (77). Women who wanted to effect change were not supported by the state structures, and their voices were not acknowledged in the political discourse.

Whereas the 'revitalised democracy' arguments are the most appealing, in political systems marked by clientelism, corruption and a closed political elite, quotas may be the least likely to transform politics or improve women's substantive representation. Along with other scholars, I would argue that in contexts of regime control and clientelism, quotas are unlikely to bring into office women who are seeking social transformation, and will most probably favour party and tribal loyalists who will make little effort to promote gender interests, as I will discuss in relation to Jordan (Cowley and Childs, 2003; Dahlerup, 2006; Franceschet and Krook, 2008).

Finally, another important branch of literature on quotas, stressing the shift from 'equality of opportunities' to 'equality of results', distinguishes between 'incremental track' and 'fast track discourse' (Dahlerup, 2006). According to the former, women do not have the same political resources as men, and there is a need for a gradual improvement in those resources so that prejudice against women will disappear as society develops. The fast track discourse, assuming that an increase in resources might not automatically lead to equal representation, claims that quotas will immediately transform the gender composition of elected bodies, and will thereby lead the way into broader sociocultural transformation (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2010). The responsibility for dealing with the under-representation of women remains within the political institutions, and mandatory quotas for female candidates are seen as the faster and better solution to the problem. However, I would add that the risk is high that 'elected' women, who might represent their families, their parties and their own interests, will do little to challenge power inequalities within society, especially in countries where clientelism, pro-regime tribes and party elites are embedded within the political and social system, as happens in the Middle East.

Women's political presence in Jordan

Before analysing how gender quotas have been adopted within the Jordanian system, I am going to provide a brief formal overview of women's political participation in the country. In this section, I aim to give some historical and numerical evidence of the presence of women in Jordanian parliament and at the municipal level.

Women in Jordan gained the right to vote and to stand for parliamentary elections in 1974; however, since the activity of political parties was banned until 1989, it was only in that year that women were able to vote and stand for parliament. The percentage of women in the Senate (Upper House) and Lower House¹⁰ is 12.2% and 11.7% respectively (IPU data, 2013a). The King has discretion to make appointments to the Upper House; the selection process varies, but a candidate's political experience is always a criterion for consideration.¹¹ Since 1989, women have been increasingly appointed to the 40-member House of Senate: in 1989, one woman was appointed; in 1993, two women; in 1997, three women; and in 2003, three women. In 2007, the number of members in the Senate was increased from 40 to 55, and seven women were appointed to this expanded chamber. Lastly, in 2010 the number of members increased again from 55 to 60, and the King appointed seven women (Al-Attiyat, 2005: 29–30).

Women's participation in the Lower House, as both voters and candidates, has seen positive changes over the various elections. In the 1989 elections, 12 female candidates stood, but none won; each received between 150 and 4,000 votes. In 1993,¹² only three women stood for election. Toujan Faisal at this time became the first female member of the Lower House in Jordan's history.¹³ Although Toujan Faisal won through a quota reserved for the Circassian minority, her victory set a precedent and encouraged more women to stand for the next election. However, while 17 women were candidates in 1997, none of them managed to win seats; Toujan Faisal was also unable to defend her seat.

¹⁰ The Lower House may approve, reject or amend legislation proposed by the Cabinet, but its ability to initiate legislation is limited. It cannot enact laws without the assent of the 55-seat Upper House.

¹¹ Another criterion for consideration is that the person must be a known figure on the Jordanian scene. Most of the chamber's members are former ministers or prime ministers, or long-serving politicians.

¹² This election was held under a new election law and the SNTV electoral system, which replaced the block vote (in which voters had as many votes as there were seats to be filled in each multi-member district) used in the 1989 elections.

¹³ Of Circassian origin, Toujan Faisal was an MP from 1993 until 1997.

I met Toujan Faisal at her home in June 2011, and I spent an entire afternoon listening to her story. I was fascinated by the strength and passion she still puts into her political activism. Her account usefully reflects upon the reasons why she did not get elected in 1997:

When I was a member of parliament, the King (Hussein bin Talal) started to meet with me, secretly. We met around 20 times. He tried to make me his man. Although he liked me, I have been told that he said: 'I don't want to see her in parliament ever again, whatever it takes. Don't underestimate her next time' [referring to the 1997 elections]. In the next elections, I got a huge number of votes... but the people who were supposed to count the votes, after one hour of work, they took a break... and when they came back they said they were done. The man in my constituency won and I did not. They said I had around 4,000 votes, and the other man got 5,000 votes. Immediately after the elections, the King offered me the Senate, while he was dying. And there I decided to be the people's man, not the King's man (Amman, 7 June 2011).

Toujan Faisal's account raises very important yet problematic points. The control over votes that she denounces reflects the regime's desire to have only selected representatives in parliament in order to secure for itself the support of most parliamentary members; it therefore excludes members like Toujan, who could have been very outspoken. Moreover, the King's offer of a position in the Senate tells us a great deal about the secondary role to which the Upper House is consigned; this explains why women's chances of achieving a seat by appointment are greater than by electoral means. Lastly, in considering herself the people's *man*, Toujan is reproducing the stereotype that politics is a male arena, seeing the primary characteristics of politicians in men. Although Toujan Faisal is not representative of all female candidates, she raises important and critical points that will be developed throughout this chapter.

In the 2003 election, out of a total of 760 candidates, 54 were women. In that year

the government introduced a new election law,¹⁴ which on the one hand increased the number of seats in the Lower House from 80 to 110, and on the other introduced a quota system of six reserved seats for women.¹⁵

The parliament also allocated six seats to women as part of the reserved-seats quota system in the 2007 elections; at that time no women were able to win seats by election. Moreover, the new female members of parliament (MPs) were not from Amman, but instead came from small districts, as a consequence of the election law's unfairness in relation to the counting system, which will be explained later in this chapter. Probably encouraged (as many of the female candidates I interviewed confirmed) by the introduction of the reserved seats, in the 2007 elections women stood in unprecedented numbers: out of a total of 850 candidates, 199 were women. However, only one woman was elected to parliament outside of the quota system, Falak Jama'ani.¹⁶ Why were women not more successful? Women's being 'unqualified' as representatives cannot be a justification for this, or at least it cannot be the only one. The analysis should dig deeper into Jordanian society, the perception of women in politics, and the role of international financial incentives, as I will explore in the next sections.

For the 2010 elections, the number of seats allocated to women increased from six to 12 through an amended election law,¹⁷ allocating a woman to each of the 12 governorates. However, the law did not take into consideration the Bedouin division of the country, which includes Northern, Central and Southern Badia.¹⁸ Compared to the 2007 elections, in 2010 the number of candidates decreased to 133, and the final number of women elected was 13: only one woman, Reem Badran from Amman, was elected outside of the quota system. Reem Badran comes from a 'political family', since her father served as Jordanian prime minister.¹⁹ For this reason she has been

¹⁴ Election Law No. 34 of 2001, King Abdullah II.

¹⁵ In the region, three different types of gender quota are used: political party quotas, legal candidate quotas, and reserved-seats quotas. The number of women in Arab politics is low: according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in 2013 the Arab world ranked as the lowest region for the presence of women in national parliaments, with a percentage of 13.8% (IPU data, 2013b). Few countries in the region have passed affirmative action measures such as quotas (Morocco, Afghanistan and Iraq for example).

¹⁶ Falak Jama'ani first entered parliament in 2003, in the second electoral district in Madaba, through the quota system. At that time, she received 1,048 votes (7.95% of the total). She has had a distinguished career in dentistry (NDI, 2007: 13).

¹⁷ The Jordanian government endorsed by royal decree a temporary election law on 18 May 2010.

¹⁸ For the 2013 elections the number of seats increased from 12 to 15, to take into consideration the Bedouin districts.

¹⁹ Adnan Badran was Prime Minister of Jordan from 7 April 2005 to 27 November 2005.

criticised by candidates I interviewed as the daughter of an important political man. Family relationships are one of the first objections that people raise against women in politics, as Al-Ali and Pratt (2009b) have shown in the case of Iraq, where a women's rights activist complained that 'most of the women who are in Parliament (...) are the wives, daughters, and sisters of conservative Islamist politicians' (132). Although Reem Badran does not come from a conservative Islamist family, there is general agreement among the women I interviewed that she won because of her family's support for the government, and because it would be less problematic for the government to have someone on its side. During a brief but interesting interview I conducted at her office in parliament, Reem Badran, a middle-aged businesswoman, confirmed that the importance of her family helped her to win, but said that she did not think her father's name was the only factor that had brought her into office:

My family's name was good for me. How did I win? It was a combination of factors: number one, the family's history. Of course the family's reputation is important. If I had had a bad family, if my father had gone to jail, of course that would not have helped me. But it is also a matter of being an active and a good woman, being able to serve, being educated, proving that you are a credible person. It is a bit of everything. During the campaign I felt this pressure [her family's name]. Actually at the beginning I said that I did not want to take advantage of this, but then I thought that this is a competition. Why not? And my family's reputation is something that I should be proud of (Amman, 26 May 2011).

There is little doubt that successful election comes from a combination of factors. In my view, in order to achieve proper political representation and participation, female as well as male members of parliament need to be considered for what they actually do once they get into politics, rather than for where they come from. In the final chapter I will address questions of representation by looking carefully into female candidates' programmes before and after their election.

In the 2013 elections the reserved-seats quota was increased from 12 to 15, including the Bedouin districts. The number of women elected was 18; thus three women managed to win outside of the quota system.

Women gained the right to vote and stand in municipal and village elections in 1982. Although likely to vote, women were hesitant to stand as candidates at this time. Politics was very much seen as a male arena, and the idea that women are not competent for politics was much stronger at that time (Abou-Zeid, 2006). By 1995, some progress had been made, but only in terms of the number of women running for office: 20 women ran, nine won council seats, and one woman – Iman Fatimat – won a mayoral race. In the 1999 elections, eight of 43 female candidates won seats; the Cabinet appointed a further 25 of the candidates to positions. The 2003 elections saw a higher number of women running for office. The government showed ‘support’ for women in politics by adopting the reserved-seats quota in parliament, and it appears that more women were encouraged to run for office. However, only five women out of the 46 who stood for election won seats. In an effort to show at least some support for female representation in each municipal council, the Cabinet appointed a further 94 women (27% of the total number of appointments).²⁰

In the 2007 elections women turned out in record numbers to vote, and participated in unprecedented numbers in the municipal elections: 355 women declared their candidacy, and 20 won seats. In 2007, thanks to an amended municipalities law²¹ that allocated 20% of seats to women (increased to 25% in 2011), a further 195 women were appointed to positions, vastly increasing the number of women on municipal councils by comparison with previous years. UNIFEM was also instrumental in this drastic change in women’s political representation. In close collaboration with the JNFW, a semi-governmental royal-supported organisation, UNIFEM conducted a high-profile campaign to boost women’s participation at decision-making levels for the 2007 elections. UNIFEM organised a series of workshops, held across 12 governorates in Jordan, aimed at strengthening the capacities of female candidates. These workshops helped to ‘not only prepare women to increase their role in political affairs, but also to prepare their communities and country to accept the need for women’s leadership’ (UN–WOMEN, 2007). Although these and similar workshops²² may have pushed more women to run, I think that the more explicit apparent support from the government, through the introduction of reserved seats in parliament and the adoption of the 20% quota in municipal elections, encouraged more women to

²⁰ A woman was also appointed mayor (Al-Attiyat, 2005: 34).

²¹ Municipalities Law No. 29, 1955, revised in 2007.

²² The implications, aims and consequences of workshops like these will be the focus of my analysis in the next chapter.

participate too. However, the reasons behind the adoption of such measures, and the consequences of having more women in politics in terms of women's rights, need to be better explored.

As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, the political participation of women is not limited to parliamentary and municipal elections, but happens throughout all levels of society,²³ and includes any instance or manifestation of power relations (the politics of language, of exchange and of representation). In the next sections I aim to show how women's organisations and international affairs influenced the adoption of the above-mentioned affirmative action measures in Jordan.

Perspectives on the adoption of gender quotas

As described in the previous section, Jordan adopted a quota of six reserved seats in parliament in 2003 – which was increased to 12 in 2010 and 15 in 2013 – and a 20% threshold quota for municipal elections in 2007, increased to 25% in 2011. In this section I aim to analyse the debates about the adoption of quotas through the findings from the interviews I conducted in Jordan with female candidates, female parliamentarians and women's rights activists, reconnecting them to relevant theoretical discussions. Since my research focuses on the adoption of reserved seats in parliament, I primarily discussed this type of gender quota during my fieldwork: why was it adopted, and what were the perspectives of women on this?

In her analysis of gender quotas adopted in parliaments globally, Krook (2009) suggests that there are four possible explanations of who supports quota policies and why they are ultimately adopted. The first is that women advocate quotas in order to increase women's representation. Usually this occurs when women's groups realise that quotas are an effective and maybe the only way to increase women's political representation. This tends to happen in countries where a patriarchal understanding of

²³ The 2004 UNIFEM report on the status of Jordanian women analyses women's participation in voluntary organisations, political parties, labour unions and political associations. The report shows that where membership in groups was practically compulsory, as with labour unions and professional associations, the presence of women was higher than in other associations: 23% in the former, versus 18.9% in the latter. Women's participation in voluntary associations is also quite low, oscillating between 19% and 25%, depending on the different roles performed, such as taking part in general assemblies, founding committees or administrative boards. When we consider the situation with political parties, the percentage is even worse, with an average of 10% female participation (UNIFEM, 2004).

politics is rooted in the belief that politics is a male arena. The second explanation is that political elites adopt quotas for strategic reasons. Different case studies suggest, for example, that party elites often adopt quotas when one of their rivals adopts them (Caul, 2001). The third explanation is that quotas are adopted when they blend with existing or emerging notions of equality and representation. Quotas for women are an extension of guarantees given to other groups based on linguistic, religious, racial and other identities. In this case, quotas tend to appear during periods of democratic innovation, when they may be seen as a way to establish the legitimacy of a new political system during democratic transition or the creation of new democratic institutions (Krook, 2009: 11). This has happened particularly in post-conflict situations, such as in Iraq, where quotas were seen as a way for a ‘democratic system’ to be introduced into a new political structure (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009b). The last explanation is that quotas are supported by international norms and practices. Over the last 10 years, a diversity of international organisations and bodies has issued declarations recommending that all states aim for 30% female participation in all political bodies. The international community has influenced not only relatively stable countries such as Jordan, but also post-conflict countries such as Iraq and, particularly, Afghanistan, where the gender quota guarantees almost 28% female participation in the bicameral National Assembly.²⁴ In Afghanistan, the international community has promoted the attention to the ‘politics of presence’ rather than the ‘politics of ideas’ (Wordsworth, 2007) and the role of the UN in particular has been considered crucial in this (Krook et al., 2010). However, although the quota was supported by Afghan women’s organisations, I agree with Ballington and Dahlerup (2006)’s view: such an inclusion of women in the institutions of government is critical to the extent that the gain of a parliamentary seat is not an end in itself, but simply a means for participating in authoritative decision-making that influences how society functions.

In the case of Jordan, the role of women’s organisations and civil society, and the impact of international norms and agreements on the national government, have been fundamental in the achievement of the current situation. Women in Jordan have been fighting for more participation in politics since the early 1950s. One of the early women’s organisations, the AWO, established in 1954, started a campaign by sending

²⁴ Article 83 of the Afghan Constitution, adopted in 2004.

several petitions to the Prime Minister as well as to Cabinet members, demanding more political rights for women at all levels. After the right to vote in and stand for elections was obtained, debates and actions concerning the adoption of a quota system took place in the Jordanian public sphere, directly after the first national elections in 1993. These debates, which were mainly triggered by women's and several other civil society organisations, focused on possible mechanisms to enhance women's political participation. In the early 1990s, women activists from different backgrounds and from diverse women's organisations ran a huge campaign concerning the various possibilities for implementing the quota system as a mechanism to enhance women's political participation (David and Nanes, 2011). There were many opinions regarding the effects of the implementation of a quota system on women's participation in political life. Some thought that such a system would be prejudicial to equality between women and men (Al-Atiyat, 2003). This was the case with the independent JWU. JWU activists today are still strongly against the use of quotas, as Nadia Shamrouk, the director, told me during a long and exciting interview at her office: 'I would like women to reach a position in society because that woman convinces people through her voice, and so she gets elected' (Amman, 17 January 2011). The JWU is the only organisation among the major women's groups that is against the adoption of a quota system. The JWU historically has adopted a very politicised approach, placing women's needs and perspectives at the core of its decisions on the one hand, and bravely opposing the government's views and policies on the other, as described in chapter two.

The organisation that acted in favour of the quota historically, and that continues to champion it, is the AWO. According to their programme director, Leila Hamarneh, the quota-seats system adopted by the government is still not enough: 'The quota is not enough to increase women's political participation. It is a necessary instrument, but it needs to be supported by other measures' (Amman, 11 January 2011), such as awareness campaigns for both candidates and voters. Moreover, the AWO believes that it is necessary to increase the threshold quota in parliament to 30%, so that 'women will be much more united, and they will have more confidence and awareness of working towards and for women's rights' (Leila Hamarneh, Amman, 11 January 2011).

On International Women's Day on 8 March 2011, the main women's organisations in Jordan launched a campaign to increase women's participation in politics and

society, making demands for a female quota of 30% in parliament and at the municipal level. Agreeing with Leila Krook (2009) that it is necessary to include other supporting activities alongside quotas, Asma Khader, the president of the JNCW, a semi-governmental organisation, said to me: 'After the 2010 election the quota system had a great success, but it is not enough to push women into politics. Women need to be trained politically, and they have to gain more self-confidence' (Amman, 28 November 2010).

Following on from Khader's comment, one might ask to what extent and under what circumstances quotas will eventually empower women. The fact of representing some citizens may give previously excluded groups the right not only to choose as far as their own lives are concerned, but also to participate in society. Samar, the JNFW project director, connected the adoption of quotas with the concept of empowerment when she told me:

The quota is a tool to attain women's empowerment. Women should be able to run for election and to win by themselves, but, because of the patriarchal society, the quota is a tool for women to participate in politics and to gain a voice. Hopefully in several years women will win elections without the quota (Amman, 13 January 2011).

As Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2010) point out in their analysis of the 'fast track' model in the Scandinavian context, quotas are a 'means to open up systems of closed and male-dominated recruitment patterns' (181), and in quantitative terms quotas have been effective in increasing the number of women in the political arena. Even Leila Sharaf, the first female Senator in Jordan, told me that in order for women not to be considered merely a 'symbol' within the family, a higher number is necessary: 'There is a need for more women, because only one hand cannot clap. There is a need for more women involved in public life; they have to take part in decision-making positions. Without a quota we will always be a symbol' (Amman, 8 March 2011). Others consider the quota system to be capable of ensuring greater participation of women in political life, particularly in cases where women's social situation and the prevalence of certain traditions and customs hamper their participation, such as in rural and remote areas, as May Abu Alseemen, also a Senator, told me:

A quota is not the right way to reach the awareness of people in order to show that women can do something, but, at the moment, it is probably the only way to change the mentality of people living in the rural areas. It is a matter of time to raise awareness both of voters and of the women elected (Amman, 13 January 2011).

Kawthar, a passionate candidate from Zarqa, also stressed this point: ‘A quota is helpful, because this will give women a chance to be decision-makers. The quota is especially good for villages and remote areas, where they are more conservative’ (Zarqa, 2 February 2011). However, I believe that a qualitative analysis of the role of women in politics is necessary in order to understand the impact that such women have once they enter politics. Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2010) suggest further research on this, and I would add that although numbers are important up to a point, the analysis also needs to focus on the contexts in which women operate, on external factors such as the communities where women live, and most importantly on the backgrounds, experience and visions of the female candidates. Indeed, Hala, the Director of the GSF, supported my idea when she convincingly argued that the quota per se is useless for women’s empowerment, and that it is necessary to work on the broader context in which the system is adopted:

The quota is a form of empowerment as long as you are working on certain elements within the quota for a certain time. This quota, for example, has been played to take advantage of certain tribes. We are getting certain women in, but nothing is happening inside. The image of women is not changing in society. It gives voice to women only theoretically (Amman, 20 December 2012).

In line with Hala’s comment, I argue that as long as quotas are introduced into systems where parliament and political institutions function merely as patronage machines, they are unlikely to be means of empowerment in and of themselves. As Liddell (2009) points out in the context of the introduction of gender quotas in the Moroccan parliament, increasing the representation of women in institutions might act as a ‘surface reform taking pressure off male elites to genuinely empower women in

decision making-positions' (79).

Although many criticise the quota system, most of the female candidates²⁵ I interviewed were in favour of it. They also explained to me that the doubling of the number of seats in 2010, from six to 12, had influenced and encouraged their decision to run. Since there were more reserved seats assigned to women, they thought they had a better chance of winning, as Khawla, a very outspoken lawyer from Jerash, explained to me when I asked her why she had decided to run: 'I ran for different reasons. First, thanks to the quota I thought I had a better opportunity to win; and second, no one was running in my tribe and I also thought I had better chances to win because of this' (Jerash, 5 February 2011). In their recent study of the quota at the municipal level in Jordan, David and Nanes (2011) found out that preliminary results showed that the introduction of the 20% quota for municipal elections had encouraged many women to enter the political arena. The majority of the female candidates I interviewed, especially those living outside Amman, explained to me that they had tried to calculate how many votes they would be able to get in order to decide whether it was worthwhile becoming a candidate. If, as in the case of Khawla, no one else in their tribe was running, that gave the hidden quota a stronger significance.

Although the introduction of the reserved-seats quota for parliament in Jordan may have encouraged more women to get out and experience candidacy, other female candidates were very much against this measure. Some arguments against the quota system emphasise that such affirmative action might be seen as a form of 'special treatment' or 'specific advantage' to compensate for some kind of discrimination (Bacchi, 2006). A middle-aged woman candidate from Karak, who had been advocating women's rights in her community for long time, was firmly against the introduction of the quota, as she told me at my place in Amman while we were enjoying tea together: 'The quota is unfair to women. Women have fixed percentages because they are considered to be a special case. But we are not a special case: we have the right to participate in politics like men do' (Amman, 23 January 2011). Characterising affirmative action as 'special help' for those considered to be 'disadvantaged' tends to 'stigmatise affirmative action targets' (Bacchi, 2006: 34) – women in this case – and undermines the potential effectiveness of the reform, since it marks 'the most disadvantaged class as inherently deficient, insatiable, as needing

²⁵ Eighteen of the 26 candidates I interviewed.

more and more' (Fraser, 1997: 115). Once again, women are considered a disadvantaged rather than an enriching part of society, and risk becoming even more discriminated against and marginalised.

International influence on the adoption of gender quotas

According to Krook's (2009) and Abou-Zeid's (2006) analyses of the factors behind the adoption of quotas (globally and in the Arab World respectively), several developing countries have been influenced by international agreements in this process. The CEDAW and the BPFA continue to push women's organisations towards the goals enshrined in such conventions, especially with reference to the Arab world. Moreover, the third UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG),²⁶ which is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, and which demands that a specific proportion of parliamentary seats be held by women by 2015, has been influencing the adoption of affirmative action measures such as quotas worldwide. Krook et al. (2010) have shown that more than three quarters of all proposals to adopt gender quotas were introduced during the last 15 years, which directly follows the rise of gender mainstreaming after Beijing 1995 and the popularity of women's empowerment programmes in development practice. Furthermore, the goals of the BPFA (1995) and the MDGs (2000) explicitly promoted the idea of women's importance for economic development. This new rhetoric rapidly created an economic incentive to 'institutionally incorporate women into the political systems of countries with oftentimes less than stellar reputations for upholding women's rights' (Bozena, 2010: 6), such as Sudan and Afghanistan. Also, as Bozena (2010) shows in her paper on the strategic use of quotas in the Arab world, these affirmative action measures might be seen as a 'by-product of Arab governments' attempts to attain "democracy" benchmarks set by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, rather than to truly enfranchise women' (1). Writing in the context of the promotion of women's rights and democracy in the Arab world, Marina Ottaway (2004) claims that increasing women's political participation can be a cheap way for highly authoritarian political systems to demonstrate democratic credentials.

As described in the previous section, women's organisations in Jordan, although

²⁶ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml> [accessed 9 April 2013].

not always unified, have lobbied for the introduction of quota systems at both the parliamentary and the municipal level with apparent success, especially after the first elections held without quotas saw only one woman elected. While women's organisations were, hopefully, influenced by principles of gender equality, the role of the Jordanian government has been fundamental in the adoption of such measures.

As described in chapter two, Jordan is the sixth largest receiver of US 'democracy promotion' funds worldwide. In their study of quotas at the municipal level in Jordan, David and Nanes (2011) have clearly demonstrated that the adoption of the 20% threshold for women on municipal councils was not entirely due to women's organisations' lobbying activities, but was especially pushed by US financial interests. Jordan had a chance to receive financial support from the US through a specific programme, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). In February 2006, the women's quota for municipal councils was included in the municipal elections bill, and in September of that year Jordan received US\$25 million from the Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) Threshold Programme to fund two activities, one of which aimed at 'increasing the participation of women in electoral politics through public *fora*, training and media outreach' (David and Nanes, 2011: 289). Two months later, Jordan was selected as eligible for the Compact Programme, which offers more assistance than the MCC Threshold Programme, and which Jordan won in October 2010 with a grant of US\$275 million. According to David and Nanes (2011: 289), women's organisations played a limited role in the lobbying for the municipal quota, and once the bill went before parliament, women activist did not lobby for it at all. The explanation that women activists gave was that they had had trouble with parliament before on issues such as divorce rights for women, the nationality law and honour crime, and that they did not want any more trouble. However, the government, which was against reforms to the personal status and nationality laws, suddenly gave women a 20% quota on municipal councils (David and Nanes, 2011: 289). As discussed in greater detail in chapters two and five, the willingness to grant specific rights within the public sphere collides with the regime's more conservative reluctance to amend personal or familial laws, which might have a broader socio-political impact within society and the private sphere.

Although the parliamentary quota was introduced before the 2007 municipal elections, Rabiha ad-Dabbas, the head of the women's quota committee in the Ministry of the Interior at the time, made it clear that the parliamentary quota 'was not

a law but a one-time gift from the King designed to empower women in legislative authority' (David and Nanes, 2011: 293). In 2010 the parliamentary quota was doubled from six to 12 seats, and after the 2010 election Jordan was 'promoted' to the Compact Programme, receiving more funding from the US. The head of the Quota Commission during the 2010 elections told me during an interview I conducted at his office: 'The Arab World is ranked as the lowest part of the world for what concerns women's political participation, and we need to be comparable to other countries in order to progress within the democratisation process' (Amman, 12 December 2010). The emphasis was not on women and their capabilities and potential contributions to the political arena, but was more related to the process of democratisation, to the idea of being in line with other countries' policies in relation to women's empowerment promotion. However, when I asked him what the other 'improvements' by the Jordanian government to promote the status of women were, especially in relation to the personal status law, he replied: 'Because of Arab culture, such progress is very slow.' His comment reflects the regime's vision of (not) improving the status of women's rights in the country.

While this has been the approach of governmental officials, how have female candidates perceived this instrumentalisation of quotas for other ends? According to my interviewees and to previous research (David and Nanes, 2011), candidates perceived the adoption of the quota system as coming directly from the King and Queen – in other words, as a royal gift. Loyalty towards and trust in the royal family often came up during discussions of the reasons behind the adoption of the quota, as Zachieh, a candidate from Madaba, told me in front of a picture of herself with the King: 'Quotas are dictated by the King, Queen Rania and Princess Basma. They believe that women in Jordan should have an effective role in this field. They supported gender quotas and they support a more active participation of women in society' (Madaba, 4 February 2011). However, I also encountered more explicit criticisms of the adoption of quotas than those collected by David and Nanes (2011) in relation to municipal candidates in Jordan. The quota was perceived as a measure adopted not for women or because of women activists' lobbying, but because of international pressure, as Dr Sabah, a candidate from Karak, emotionally told me: 'There is still no trust in women, but they increased the quota... they increased the quota only for decoration, for the media and for the international community, not for us' (Amman, 18 January 2011). I personally agree with Dr Sabah's and other

women's opinions that the introduction of quotas has been closely related to the government's instrumentalisation of women's rights and women's organisations, as a researcher at the al-Quds Centre for Political Studies revealed to me:

The government is interested in empowering women mainly because they receive donations from the international community and because they need to listen to the women's movement and to keep them quiet. The government in one way or another is interested in women's issues, but their interest is not aimed at the empowerment of women; they just aim to present themselves as if they are doing something for women. The problem is that if they increase the number of quotas in parliament on the one hand, on the other many laws against women are on standby, and they are not doing a proper job in order to improve them in the direction of respect for women's rights (Amman, 7 December 2010).

Indeed, if the government and parliament were interested in the empowerment of women, laws on honour crime, the passing on of one's nationality to one's children and women's paid employment would be taken into account. As David and Nanes (2011) argue, it is easy to claim to work on behalf of women's rights in Jordan 'without attempting more difficult, politically sensitive reforms that would actually have a larger impact on women's lives, such as amending personal status, divorce, and nationality laws' (285). There is a need for a strategy, and unless women's rights become a priority for the government, women will continue to be instrumentalised for security and economic ends (Nusair, 2009). While certain women's groups are said to work for women's interests, there should be no 'patriarchal bargain' to co-opt women's rights. Kandiyoti (1996) argues that social institutions do not merely reflect a monolithic patriarchal logic, but rather are the site of power relations and political processes through which gender hierarchies are both created and contested. In Jordan, as much as in other countries in the Middle East, women's organisations are closely connected to the government and its priorities. There is the risk that in exchange for protection, both political and financial, many women will 'barter their submissiveness and propriety in return for becoming part of the system' (Goulding, 2009: 76), maintaining the stability of the system as long as they can be a part of it (Kandiyoti,

1988).

As Bozena (2010) points out in her analysis of gender quotas and international financial benefits in the Arab world, gender quotas have been promoted by ‘progressively-minded’ (7) Arab monarchs such as King Abdullah of Jordan or King Mohammad VI of Morocco. In Tunisia too, before the recent Jasmine Revolution (2011), gender quotas were introduced under the dictator Ben Ali. However, such top-down decisions are mostly made to meet the requirements of international donors and investors, rather than out of any real interest in women’s empowerment. The motive is to ‘appear to be good’ at the regional and international level, to look ‘modern’ and show that democracy is being ‘promoted’ through women’s issues. Thus quotas are not adopted from the perspective of the demand for women’s rights, but rather ‘reflect more a cynical attempt among elites to mask other struggles under the guise of concern for the political status of women’ (Krook, 2009: 10).

Quotas and structural changes

When female Jordanian candidates, women activists and elected women agreed to the introduction of the quota system, they considered it to be a temporary tool. Although the degree of acceptance was greater than I would have expected, only few of my respondents agreed to the introduction of quotas without any reservations.²⁷ They justified the adoption of quotas as the only means through which women could attain political positions, as had been the case in Iraq. In fact, some Iraqi women interviewed by Al-Ali and Pratt (2009b) said that the quota ensured at least some female presence in public life, and several Iraqi ‘secular women activists argued how conservative parliamentarians may change their opinions with experience’ (133). One of the main critiques made by female candidates and women’s rights activists in Jordan in relation to quotas was the lack of qualified women and of women advocating women’s rights. The head of the Quota Commission underlined the lack of experience and qualifications among many women candidates during my interview at his office: ‘The majority of female candidates are not qualified enough to work properly in politics. The qualified people do not want to run for office because they are scared of losing the right support’ (Amman, 12 December 2010). However, I have

²⁷ Only four of the 26 women I interviewed had no criticism of the quotas.

to add that if this may be true for women, the same can also be said for male candidates and parliamentarians.

Although the ‘qualification’ argument might be somewhat problematic in relation to the difficulties of measuring ‘qualifications’ as such, and although the question of what exactly qualifies a person to enter politics may be an interesting one, during my fieldwork I focused my attention on candidates’ campaigns. During my 26 interviews with female candidates and four interviews with MPs, I encountered some very educated and passionate women who wanted to raise their voices to bring about change. However, some women seemed to be more interested in their community’s concerns than in promoting policies with national impact. Furthermore, only a few of them were campaigning on issues related to the promotion of women’s rights: most of the time they were discussing economic issues or problems related to their community. This situation makes sense in a context where tribal support is necessary if one wishes to attain a public position, and where the independence of female voters may be in question, as I will discuss in chapter five.

Besides the issue of qualifications, candidates discussed two difficulties in succeeding in the elections: they referred to the unfairness of the election law, and they connected it to tribal divisions within Jordanian society. Hala at the GSF told me: ‘The quota system is not a fair system in calculation: it would be fair if voting areas were similar – with the same number of voters in different constituencies. It became worse with the new law and the virtual constituencies’ (Amman, 20 December 2010). In order to better understand this, it is essential to examine the structure of the election law.

The electoral system

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the election law adopted in 1993 has been criticised and contested by analysts, activists, political observers and civic groups. Although this law was modified in June 2012, I will refer to the law that was in use during the 2010 elections.

Before the 2010 elections, civil society organisations saw an opportunity to strengthen their role in shaping the electoral process in Jordan, and worked to build up public demand for electoral reform. A coalition of civil society organisations and women’s groups formally submitted recommendations to the government. At the

institutional level, electoral law is considered to be ‘one of the most important indicators of the existence of a degree of participation in politics, but it does not always indicate the existence of democracy in a political regime’ (Al-Attiyat, 2005: 54). The coalition that advocated reform of the electoral law in 2010 mainly demanded the elimination of the SNTV (one-person one-vote) system, which tended to favour very strong tribal candidates, and sought greater recognition of parties both inside and outside parliament. Women’s organisations advocated a greater representation of women in politics, asking for a higher percentage in the quota system. However, the main expectations were not met. The new law promulgated in May 2010 preserved the SNTV system, and rejected any attempt to shift towards proportional representation or party lists.²⁸ As described above, the law doubled the number of reserved seats for women from six to 12, but it also increased the total number of seats in the Lower House from 110 to 120. Four seats were added for the heavily populated Palestinian areas in Amman, Irbid and Zarqa. Moreover, the new law introduced a ‘unique system of districting, in which the country’s main electoral zones are divided into “virtual” sub-districts equal to the number of seats assigned to the zone’ (NDI, 2010). Candidates register to run in a sub-district of their choice, and voters can cast one ballot for a candidate in any sub-district in their electoral zone. The sub-districts are called ‘virtual’ because they do not correspond to any particular geographical area. The voters can vote in each virtual constituency for only one candidate from the whole constituency. The candidate needs to choose only one virtual constituency. The first-past-the-post winner in the virtual constituency gains a place in parliament, alongside the winners from all the other virtual constituencies. The distribution of constituencies is not dependent on the size of the population, and is not proportional to the number of people. It can happen that a candidate in a virtual constituency can win with a lower number of votes than were received by another candidate in another virtual constituency within the same overall constituency, and this also has a negative effect in relation to the quota. Dr Sabah, the extremely strong and passionate candidate from Karak, explained to me that she did not win, even though she had the highest number of votes in her virtual constituency:

²⁸ The law invoked stricter penalties for electoral fraud, including vote-buying; broadened election administration beyond the Ministry of the Interior, adding a judge as deputy head for each election committee and an independent judge to arbitrate electoral disputes; and introduced a number of procedural changes to protect the secrecy of the vote and enhance the transparency of the process.

The big problem is that the division of the constituency is not fair: the government did this in order to decide whom they want to win. With a different voting system, for instance, if there are two votes in the election, I could vote for my tribe and for the person I believe could do something. Karak is divided into Karak city (three seats, one for Christians and two for Muslims), Alqasid city (two seats, one for Muslims, one for Christians), Alwahar (one seat) and Almasar (two seats for Muslims). There is no need to divide the constituency of Almasar into two: in the first constituency a person won with 2,000 votes and in the second one won with 6,000 votes, but the one after him got 5,000 votes and did not win a seat even though he got more than 2,000 votes. It's the same with the quota: the woman who won in Karak got 1,200 votes and there were 7,000 voters. I got 2,000 votes but there were 14,000 voters. So the percentage she got was 17% (1,200 out of 7,000) and I got 14% (2,000 out of 14,000). It is unfair. I do not expect they [parliament] are going to change it soon, because they won thanks to this system. But if they are not going to change it, I will do everything I can in order to express my rejection of it, through the Internet, in newspapers and through my charity (Amman, 18 January 2011).

As well as Dr Sabah, other female candidates also heavily criticised this election law, especially those who felt that they had lost through the unfairness of the counting, as outlined above. This was the case with Fayza, the oldest candidate I interviewed, with whom I had an insightful conversation at her house in Irbid:

We have an unfair law. We need different percentages and different ways of counting. Women in big cities are disadvantaged and they can win only if they are part of a big party. Women in big cities with a high percentage, like me, do not win; I need more than 2,000 votes to win, and in remote areas 300 votes are enough in order to be a member of parliament. This is not fair (Irbid, 16 May 2011).

Terez, the middle-aged Christian candidate from Madaba and member of the JWU,

whom I referred to in chapter two, was against the introduction of the quota and demanded that the system will be changed: ‘We should amend the election law and add women in parties. The election law should focus on parties’ lists. There should also be an amendment to the calculation; it should depend on the number of votes you get. Now women from small districts can win with a low number of votes’ (Amman, 17 April 2011). Terez raises a very crucial point about the formation of constituencies in Jordan. Since urban districts such as Amman and Zarqa are believed to be populated mostly by Jordanians of Palestinian origin, there is a preference for the representation of rural areas, which historically are more loyal to the royal family, and whose presence in parliament therefore will not harm the stability of the King or the parliament.

Supporters of the quota system praise it as a form of affirmative action without which women in particular would have no seats in the Lower House or on municipal councils. It is criticised, however, because it cancels out the chances of female candidates from large electoral districts such as Amman. Such a quota system not only disadvantages urban women, but also tends to favour conservatives. Filling quota seats on the basis of percentages rather than the number of votes favours women who run in small districts with few competitors. These tend to be rural districts. Women activists have pointed out that the skewed distribution of seats may exclude from parliament the most experienced female politicians, who often live and work in the capital.

The role of tribes and cultural stereotypes

This election system clearly favours tribal relationships and solidarity at the expense of political parties and independent political candidates. The lack of political party representation and the consequent significance in Jordanian political life mean that tribes still play an important role in Jordanian politics, where family leagues have become established and institutionalised. But how does this social structure impact on women’s political participation? My respondents’ comments resonate with Abou-Zeid’s (2006) assessment that tribes and cultural stereotypes are among the strongest impediments to women’s political participation in Jordan, especially when – as in the majority of cases – tribes decide to support a man. Terez, the candidate from Madaba, told me that among all the difficulties she faced as a candidate:

The tribal nature of the state itself is an issue. My tribe was choosing to support another candidate, a man. There was a general agreement to support that man just because he was a man, related to the army, but he was not qualified for politics. And it was very difficult to get support, just because I am a woman. However, I tried to represent myself as independent, away from my tribe: I tried to convince people that it is not the tribe that represents you, but it is the candidate who represents you (Amman, 17 April 2011).

Tribalism is considered by many to be, in the words of one activist, ‘the greatest obstacle towards women’s emancipation’ (Khouri, 2004 quoted in Warrick, 2009: 132). A woman candidate²⁹ for a municipal council seat exemplified this when, explaining why she had not voted for herself, she said: ‘I would not break my commitment to the tribe. We are a tribal community and the priority is for electing a man’ (Al-Azzam, 2012: 371). Thus not only do tribes play a major political role, but their values also shape much of Jordanian ‘culture’ (Alon, 2009: 155). Tribal conservatism tends to support the cultural belief that politics is a male arena, and sometimes this negatively influences even women’s opinions about the role of female candidates: men are thought to be more politically competent, while women are considered to be both less trustworthy and less self-confident within the political system,³⁰ as Ala, a very passionate young activist, underlined during our discussion:

Having women in politics is still a taboo for our society... and this does not come only from men, but also from women. The interesting thing we found out during elections is that women do not vote for women.³¹ Both men and women questioned women’s knowledge about politics. This is the whole idea in society. They do not think women are good enough or are capable of working in

²⁹ The candidate Fardous Mohammad Al Khaldi ran for a seat in the Sabha and Dafianeh municipal council in Mafraq.

³⁰ A study undertaken by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan in 1996 found that Jordanian society continues to lack confidence in women’s political and decision-making abilities (Shatwi and Daghestani 1996 in Al-Attiyat, 2005: 53).

³¹ Ala participated in an awareness campaign promoted by the al-Hayat Centre to encourage more young people to vote.

politics. They think it is too hard a task that only a man can do (Amman, 7 April 2011).

The unconditional support for men from tribes was the main element pointed out by my interviewees. The gender factor of being a man was often also related to the man's relationship with the army, as in case of Terez above, and in the following story from Zachieh, another candidate from the Madaba area:

I had the full support of my husband. Sometimes I wanted to give up, but he was pushing me not to do that. In terms of tribes, my husband's tribe did not support me at all. Not one of them gave me a vote. The person who won the candidacy in Ma'in,³² a man, had a very high position in the military. Of course people preferred to vote for him. He promised voters that he would find them jobs and other benefits. My tribe supported me, but not all of them knew me so well and they do not all live here in Madaba. Since there is a huge degree of loyalty to your own tribe, even if people know that the candidate is not good enough, they vote for him because he is part of their tribe. This is loyalty to your tribe (Madaba, 4 February 2011).

Moreover, sometimes women told me that the tribe's influential members and the *mukhabarat* tried to discourage them from running so that the man supported by the tribe would have not had any 'troublesome' competitors. One candidate revealed to me that someone from the *mukhabarat* tried to convince her not to run; according to her, some of her votes 'disappeared' during counting, recalling Toujan Faisal's previous account:

Inside my tribe, another man ran for election. Two days before the elections I received a phone call from someone from the *mukhabarat* inside the government, urging me not to run. But I did not care and I ran. The funny thing is that apparently I got 2,079

³² Ma'in is a town in the governorate of Madaba.

votes, but I do not know how at the end I had only 279 votes. That 0 disappeared... [she laughs]. The man from my tribe got 8,000 votes, which is a huge number for a person in my city. Nobody before has ever had such a high number of votes in a parliamentary election. That was fraud, and I was the victim. This man was a good friend of someone in the government (Amman, 12 January 2011).

Unfortunately the discouragement of female candidates from participating in elections did not only take the form of telephone calls and alleged fraud, but also involved cases of violence. Two women I met complained of acts of violence against them during their candidacy, which they presumed had come from their tribe, because the tribe was firmly against their candidacy. One woman who lives outside Amman told me, still upset and crying:

All my banners have been burned down. I received creepy phone calls and text messages that made my husband and me very upset. I know my tribe does not support me, because they want their man to win. But I have also been threatened with a knife while picking up my car. I am scared, yes, but I believe in what I am doing and I hope the institutions will be there to help me (Amman, 23 January 2011).

Often when tribes do not support a candidate they will try to hamper that candidate's campaign. Women not only have to live in a context where political participation is still considered a male arena, but they also have to bear physical and psychological violence against them. Dr Sabah, the candidate from Karak, also explained to me how tribal divisions reinforce violence and how, through an implementation and modification of the election law, this situation may change with time:

All the problems that Jordan is suffering now come from the election law, especially the violence. All the tribes hate each other. If it becomes possible to vote for two or three candidates, the tribes will cooperate with each other. Now, even within the same tribe

there are problems, using guns and spreading violence. People are very close to their tribe; thus to vote for your tribe is almost necessary (Amman, 18 January 2011).

Violence may help to signal a tribe's strength, and it also reveals the complicated and multifaceted relationship between tribes and the state. Moreover, in order to be represented in parliament, a tribe can nominate a candidate and mobilise votes for that candidate not only from that specific tribe, but also through campaigning among other tribes, especially those small enough not to warrant their own candidate (Al-Attayat, 2005: 53). This was the case with Dr Sabah, who explained to me that another, smaller tribe that had agreed to vote for her ultimately failed to support her on election day because a bigger tribe had offered them more services. Such a system works to the advantage of bigger tribes:

With this law only the big tribes win. In my community there are two big tribes: the Tarawnah and the Sarayra. In every election they win. A lot of tribes are smaller and do not have a chance to win. The big two tribes usually go to the small ones and convince them not to run, promising services. In my community there is another tribe, called the Qatawna, they live in my village and they are smaller. We called them in order to support them in the local municipal councils, and they were to support us in this parliamentary election; this agreement lasted 24 hours. The Tarawnah went to them and convinced them not to support us. Until the last minute they [the Qatawna] said that they would support me. But on election day, they disappeared. I was the only one running in my tribe. In the Tarawnah tribe there were four people running (Amman, 18 January 2011).

Family ties and social connections shape citizens' expectations about a candidate. Indeed, as Lust and Hourani argue (2011: 120), Jordanians expect that people from the same tribe, family, neighbourhood or personal network will give each other special support, and the bigger and more influential the tribe, the more services might be on offer.

In relation to the introduction of quotas, the advantages of such a measure have not been lost on either the tribes or the Islamists. Although both sectors are conservative with regard to the promotion of women's rights, they have recognised in gender quotas an opportunity to serve their own interests through new means. One of the risks inherent in the apparent advantage of quotas is that a woman candidate might be supported not because of her professional or social background, but simply because the quota gives her a better chance of winning and therefore of representing the tribe's interests. In this context, there is also the risk that women will be merely proxies, since in practice they are excluded from the networks of patronage, which are entirely male-dominated.

May Abu Alseemen, the President of the JNFW, was clear about the risk of the instrumentalisation of women by certain tribes and of having 'token' women in power: 'One of the main problems in the current system is that tribes will support any woman, without caring about their qualifications and preparation to be a good elected member of parliament. We need to have good and structured parties: parties will push and promote qualified women' (Amman, 13 January 2011). Five of the women elected to quota seats in 2003 were described as 'tribal' or Islamist candidates: the Islamic Action Front's candidate, Dr Hayat al-Museimi; three women from the very conservative southern towns of Tafilah and Karak; and a tribal candidate from the north. These women often voted against amendments to legislation such as on honour crimes and divorce measures. Adab Saoud of Tafilah, for example, complained that the government's proposed amendments failed to 'develop women's causes in a way to safeguard their Islamic and Arab identity', and that increased divorce rights for women would harm families and be used frivolously (quoted in Warrick, 2009: 131). As with women in Jordan, some women politicians in Morocco have also complained of 'tokenism', referring not to their tribes but to their political parties. According to Liddell's (2009) study of clientelism and quotas in Morocco, women are active in politics, but currently no 'parties are convinced of the importance of gender issues; they just use women as pawns and objects' (85).

The tribal nature of the elections in Jordan makes them seem more like family or social celebrations, and gives the legislature a service-oriented aspect which distances it from wider political-ideological discourse and weakens the impact of political institutions. Because women have a limited presence in political institutions and positions of influence, the belief that they can provide services is very limited as well.

Similarly, the SNTV system gives tribes the strongest influence in securing victory for their candidates. Tribes tend to support male over female candidates, and when a female candidate does win the support of her tribe, the risk that she will be instrumentalised by tribal interests is high.

Corruption and financial issues as impediments to political participation

As described in the previous section, some of the women I interviewed made allegations of fraud on election day. International delegations were sent to Jordan, mainly in collaboration with local and international actors working in the country. The NDI, for instance, had a delegation that visited Jordan between 5 and 10 November 2010, which was deployed throughout the country and was comprised of 61 credentialed observers, both long and short term, from 18 countries and territories (NDI, 2010: 1). Lust and Hourami (2011: 126) argue that both domestic and international monitors have limited capacities: on the one hand, domestic monitors tend to be young, inexperienced and afraid to be critical of the process overall; on the other hand, international monitoring is conducted by too many international organisations, without being comprehensive or generating a critical analysis of the process. However, although these observers said that new improved procedures during the 2010 election marked a clear improvement over the conduct of the 2007 elections, there was some criticism of the election's transparency. According to the observations written in the al-Hayat Centre Report (2010), some candidates and their agents committed very serious violations and electoral crimes on election day, especially in relation to forging IDs as well as vote buying. These violations seriously impacted on the integrity and transparency of the elections, and the government was clearly remiss in combating these crimes. A candidate from Jerash revealed to me that a man in her tribe had started to buy votes in order to gain more support:

Towards the end of my campaign I had some issues with my tribe. A man from my tribe decided to run at the very last moment. He started buying his votes for 200 JOD each, and he spent almost 200,000 JOD to buy votes. He did not win in the end, but the 'political money' problem affected my campaign (Jerash, 12 February 2011).

The ‘political money’ problem was often connected during the interviews with the lack of finance for campaigns; candidates’ financial capacities play an essential role in this. Much of the cost of campaigning consists of expenses related to ‘hosting’ voters – which is not illegal – and in too many instances to vote-buying, which is illegal (Al-Attayat, 2005: 21). Moreover, some voters without personal ties to any candidate sell their votes to the highest bidder (Lust and Hourami, 2011). This may be particularly true of voters belonging to the lower classes, whose plight may be abused for political ends. However, the government did not take any clear position on the issue: indeed, the situation enhanced the government’s ability to manipulate the outcome. A female candidate from Jerash was very upset that there were no effective measures against corruption at the time:

I had financial issues because the campaign was very expensive. Not all of the tribe supported me, because there were another three women in my tribe and they split the vote. In 2010 I decided to run because they said that there was less corruption this time. But it was not like that. Political money is a problem. The policemen saw votes being bought and sold right before their eyes, but they did not say anything. I saw it with my own eyes as well. I didn’t denounce it this time, because I knew it would be pointless (Jerash, 12 February 2011).

This candidate revealed that there is a lack of trust in anti-corruption measures, particularly because the government does not enforce them, and that there is a need for a strong political will on the part of the government to monitor the situation. After a long pause to think about her experience, she went on:

Before the elections I wrote a report for my municipality, giving the names of people involved in cases of corruption. But it did not have any consequences for them. The truth is that the government wants only certain people in office, and political money constitutes a favour to them. I mean that, since there are a lot of poor people, with the money they receive from the candidates, the government

does not have to bother about them for that period of time. I was not scared about denouncing them, but my family is. The problem is that the people I went to in order to denounce these facts are also involved in manipulation and corruption. It is a closed circle. Talking and denouncing had a bad effect on me, because now I am being left out of the high level of society; they know that I am going to talk... I wish I could talk to the King and reveal everything (Jerash, 12 February 2011).

Political money is not the only issue. Monitoring activities revealed that numerous violations and problems also took place during the counting process, most importantly in the discrepancy between the number of ballots counted and the number of voters at polling stations. The number of votes counted at the polling stations did not match the number of votes announced at tabulation centres (al-Hayat Centre Report, 2010: 5). A candidate from Madaba explained to me that she was not sure about the counting of her votes:

The results are not transparent. The way they calculated it was not fair. In Madaba there were five other women candidates. I got the highest number of votes (526) and I was number 13 in Madaba in relation to the quota. The committee responsible for counting in Madaba contacted me before the official announcement of the results and they said I had won. Three hours later, the official results were different. First they told me that my percentage was 8.55 (the one who won in Madaba had 8.2%), and then they announced I had got 7.92%. How that happened, I do not know. It is a statistical program. The members of the committee know how to amend the results, but they were not allowed. Only the Ministry of the Interior was allowed (Madaba, 18 February 2011).

The 2010 elections have been described as ‘déjà vu’ in the context of Jordanian politics (Ryan, 2010), both in terms of the candidates elected and in terms of the lack of transparency in the election process. The latest Corruption Perceptions Index Report for 2012, released by Transparency International, showed that Jordan ranks

58th out 176 countries worldwide (CPI, 2012: 5): this report measures perceptions and not actual cases of corruption. The 2010 elections restored neither legitimacy to the government nor public confidence in parliament (Lust and Hourami, 2011). Since the elections, criticism has accelerated and people's frustration has gained force. Women activists and people demonstrating in the streets since February 2011 have been asking for serious reform on this issue, together with a reform of the election law and of political parties, as discussed in chapter two. Alongside the demonstrations, there are also some active advocacy groups in the country that have tried to provide some recommendations.³³

Recommendations from local organisations

Before and after election day in 2010, some debates came up among civil society organisations regarding possible ways of reforming the political system in Jordan. In this section I aim to give voice to selected organisations' recommendations, together with some possible scenarios for a different quota system.

One of the first organisations I met was the al-Quds Centre for Political Studies in Jabal Hussein, a research centre that focuses on socio-political studies in the region. The director and a researcher welcomed me in an extremely friendly manner and kept me there for four hours, discussing the election law, the quota system and possible reforms. They were very open and, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, they were very critical of the government's role. The researcher repeated more than once that there is a need for recognition of stronger political parties and for a different election law. Such suggestions were the main recommendations I also heard from female candidates and activists:

³³ There are also individual actions taking place. For instance, while I was in Jordan I met two women from Amman who have founded an 'anti-corruption' group on Facebook. They are trying to denounce cases of corruption online; they know that they are being closely watched by the *mukhabarat*, but they are not afraid of this. Moreover, they are also trying to formulate some proposals for new laws to fight this issue, together with other professionals whom they met through the social network or whom they already knew. This initiative was inspired by their personal experiences of candidacy. One of the two women, a very well-known figure in Jordan because of her current occupation in an advertising company, has stood repeatedly for parliament since 2007. She is very outspoken and radical in her ideas. She believes in the role of parliament, and she is also convinced that only pro-regime candidates are able to get elected – and she is not one of them. During several meetings we had, she revealed to me that she had survived a poisoning attempt during the 2007 campaign, and that during the 2010 elections the counting of the votes had been unfair. After these experiences she decided to create the group and to campaign for just and fair elections.

We need political reform, strong political parties and a very strong electoral law that will give political parties the authority to work in parliament and to have an influence on legislation. Now candidates run for elections with the support of tribes, not of parties. Political parties in the 1950s were stronger than parties today. The main obstacle is the electoral law. At the moment individuals represent their tribes. Parties do not have a voice. Getting elected gives you a lot of benefits – your children's school is paid for, for instance – and gives you prestige. Most of the MPs only do services for their small community, and these services should be provided by the governorates and not by MPs. The government agrees with this situation because they do not have strong MPs that can ask for proper reforms (Researcher, Amman, 7 December 2010).

The government controls parliament through its loyal tribesmen, and this situation gives it stability – but only at the institutional level, because people in the street are very frustrated. There is a widespread inclination towards stronger political parties and a different voting system in order to decrease the political relevance of tribes, and for all of this to be built into a national strategy. It is true that 'tribes play such a dominant role in the symbolisation of Jordan's national identity' (Layne, 1994: 138). However, people involved in politics and with a clear political ideology appear to want a different representation of interests in parliament.

After monitoring the elections, the al-Hayat Centre together with a coalition of other civil society organisations came up with some firm recommendations regarding the election law in particular (al-Hayat Centre Report, 2010). They proposed the adoption of a mixed electoral system combining majoritarian and proportional systems, improving the fairness of the distribution of parliamentary seats and adopting smaller electoral districts. They also called for the annulment of the virtual district system, which has caused great confusion, not only among voters but also among candidates. In order to eliminate or at least decrease the phenomenon of 'political money', they suggested setting a ceiling for campaign finances. Finally, they proposed the creation of an independent commission for election administration, unconnected with the Ministry of the Interior; the link with the latter was also

denounced by some female candidates as a factor that may encourage corruption.³⁴

Lastly, regarding the issue of quotas, the al-Quds Centre organised a workshop with women's organisations and other activists in March 2010 in order to discuss different scenarios for the development of the quota system for the representation of women in parliament.³⁵ Although according to an activist and lawyer I interviewed, 'creating a fair quota system is impossible' (Amman 7 December 2010), this group of organisations tried to propose something new. The first scenario is based on the adoption of a system of proportional representation – full or partial (mixed) – whereby women have a guaranteed number of seats on the national lists, with at least 20% of parliamentary seats. The second scenario redistricts constituencies on an equal basis, reducing the representation gap. The third scenario proposes a new type of calculation³⁶ of the quota in order to make it more equitable for female candidates in highly populated governorates. The fourth is based on the national women's list system, where each voter has two votes, one for the constituency representative and another for his/her choice from the national women's list. More than one woman I interviewed suggested this idea. Finally, the last scenario proposes the allocation of at least one seat for women in each governorate, with the remaining seats to be distributed among the larger governorates according to the size of their population, so that the governorate system will be treated as a single constituency.

As stated above, in June 2012 the election law was modified. The SNTV system was abolished, and a mixed electoral system was introduced. Voters were granted two votes, one for a candidate and another to be chosen from a national list, which guaranteed 27 seats for political parties. The number of MPs was increased from 120 to 150, and the reserved-seats quota for women was increased from 12 to 15, encompassing the Bedouin areas. An Independent Electoral Commission (IED) was

³⁴ The JWU started to develop a draft reform proposal after the 2010 elections as well: this brought together women activists, lawyers, political observers and experts to discuss a new election law proposal to be submitted to the government. The main idea consisted of strengthening the role of political parties by having them more represented in parliament, creating a list of parties, and eliminating virtual constituencies from the current system. Moreover, the JWU called for the elimination of the one-person one-vote system and the introduction of the option for voters to vote for at least two candidates (JWU Conference on the Election Law, Dead Sea, Jordan, January 2011). Most importantly, the JWU together with experts discussed the possibility of establishing fixed criteria for access to candidacy, so that candidates would be more qualified, at least in theory.

³⁵ Personal interview with research at al-Quds Centre, 7 December 2010.

³⁶ The new formula for calculating the winning seats will divide the number of votes for each female candidate by the total number of voters in her constituency, multiplied by the number of seats allocated for that constituency, and then choose the highest average.

also established to oversee the process, replacing the previous role of the Ministry of the Interior. Some of the recommendations demanded by civil society and women's organisations have been taken into consideration. However, these modest amendments have not changed the structural over-representation of individual tribal candidates, and political parties still remain under-represented. Moreover, the new electoral law has also not substantially changed the gerrymandering of electoral districts, thanks to which the traditionally more government-critical cities of Amman and Zarqa – which also have the highest concentrations of Palestinians – are disadvantaged in relation to the rural Transjordanian areas, which represent the traditional backbone of the monarchy. Since the parliament still has a majority of conservative and tribal candidates, providing the King with a solid support base, the institution still does not function as a representative body, but rather as a clientelist system.

Conclusions

In this thesis I do not aim to find solutions for the electoral law or the quota system in Jordan, but I would like to give voice to the efforts of civil society organisations and researchers involved in such debates. As I emphasise throughout my thesis, I believe that cooperation between the local, national and international actors is a fundamental step towards political reform.

Although the majority of the female candidates and activists I met considered quotas to be a temporary tool that was necessary to increase women's political participation in the country, I argue that the adoption of quotas might not always serve to promote women's rights. Governments and societies, in different contexts, can instrumentalise the use of quotas. As Krook (2009) suggests, with a 'closer look at the effects of quotas on the election and empowerment of women [...], particular measures may in fact "mean" different things within distinct political contexts' (16). As I will go on to demonstrate in chapter four, Jordan is closely connected to the international community, and especially to the US, for political and financial reasons. However, this cooperation does not always work in favour of women's agendas. The instrumentalisation of the use of quotas in order to gain financial benefits does not improve women's rights in the country, but actually reinforces the exclusion of women's issues from the broader political agenda.

As Phillips (1999) among others has argued, within the global context of growing neoliberalism, the adoption of quotas may contribute to an increasing separation between political empowerment on the one hand and social and economic empowerment on the other. Moreover, as I have demonstrated through the interviews I have collected, the introduction of quotas in Jordan may have rapidly increased the participation of women in politics, but it has left out of the political agenda other, more important issues that would improve women's rights, such as a revision of laws against honour crimes, a discussion of the nationality law and a reform of the personal status law. As long as the government and certain international institutions are merely interested in increasing the number of women per se, without addressing other central issues for women's empowerment, women risk being used as the easiest means to help the government to maintain a clean façade in international and regional eyes. Dahlerup (2006) argues that a country's international image has become more and more important across international and national contexts, pushing countries to market themselves as innovative.

Moreover, in a context where parliament functions as a patronage institution, the adoption of gender quotas risks becoming another way of co-opting women's issues for other ends. Therefore I believe that it is not enough to be for or against quotas in and of themselves, and that a deeper analysis of the context and material conditions of quotas is needed. We also need an analysis of the intersections of candidates' different identities: here it is important not only to focus on the gender dimension, but also to understand how tribal support and place of residence might encourage a woman to run for office. Indeed, in the case of Jordan, I have shown how the adoption of quotas has been instrumentalised not only by the government, but also by certain very conservative tribes. If tribalism generally seeks to limit women's rights and restrict them to subordinate and 'traditionalist' roles within the family, the quota system gives even these conservative actors an interest in supporting women for public office. Often this support takes no consideration of women's demands, but rests merely on tribal interests. Moreover, the election law in use during the 2010 elections was itself an obstacle not only for women, but also for men who were not related to regime-supporting tribes and who wanted to be members of parliament. The spread of corruption affects female and male candidates alike, and the adoption of quotas is a double-edged sword, which, in the case of Jordan, has mostly been used not in favour of women, but as an instrument to gain international recognition. People

are demonstrating in the streets: some recent events³⁷ have revealed the frustration of women and men in the country, highlighting the sense of uncertainty hanging over the Kingdom, and a new parliament was formed after the 2013 elections. However, real political reform seems to be a long way off.

Adding women and stirring is not enough to promote women's empowerment, and substantive representation is difficult to achieve, especially in a context where the hurdles faced by women in politics do not only arise from the adoption (or rejection) of a quota system. In empirical studies, the conceptual framework most often employed to analyse the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation has been defined as 'critical mass theory' (Childs and Krook, 2008), which argues that once women constitute a specific proportion of parliament, 'political behaviour, institutions, and public policy' will be transformed (Studlar and McAllister, 2002: 234; Waylen, 2008). However, I believe that simply counting the number of women representatives is too simplistic; the analysis should consider not only 'when women make a difference', but more especially, as Celis et al. (2008) argue, 'how the substantive representation of women occurs' (99), taking into consideration informal as well as formal political actors and roles. In a country where the authoritarian state tries to control the overall political process, the risk is high that women will parrot government views, as has happened in other countries in the region, such as Tunisia during Ben-Ali's regime³⁸ (Goulding, 2009) or Morocco (Liddell, 2009)³⁹. The use of quotas in the region, and in Jordan specifically, if not supported by other structural changes, may result in a generation of 'yes women' (Goulding, 2009: 77) who will defeat the goal of encouraging unique female voices. I argue that where women are qualitatively strong, acting in association with a supportive women's movement and network both inside and outside the parliament,

³⁷ At the beginning of 2012, prosecutors ordered the detention of former intelligence chief Mohammad Dahabi on corruption charges; young demonstrators in the southern city of Tafilah faced teargas as they protested to demand jobs; and an 18-year-old youth was sentenced by a military court to two years in prison for burning a picture of the King (Barnes-Dacey, 2012).

³⁸ Ben-Ali was the President of Tunisia from 1987 until 2011. In 1999, 11.5% of the parliament was female (21 out of 182 members), and the percentage rose to 22.8% in 2004 (43 out of 189 members). In 2007 Ben-Ali announced an increase in the ratio of women on the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (Constitutional Democratic Rally) lists of candidates to at least 30%. In Goulding's analysis of women's political participation in Tunisia, the co-option of women's issues and women's organisations becomes evident (Goulding, 2009),

³⁹ For instance, in the case of Morocco, despite an increase in the representation of women in parliament since 2002, the implementation of the national list with gender quotas 'has not come close to fundamentally changing the patriarchal power dynamics in parliament or parties themselves' (Liddell, 2009: 85).

and are seeking policies that are ideologically congruent with the governing party, they are more likely to generate social change. However, unfortunately, this does not seem to be the main political trend in Jordan, as I will depict in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

IS TRANSFORMATION POSSIBLE? WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS FOR THE 2010 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter with reference to the introduction of a reserved-seats quota system for women in parliament, the participation of women in political life has been a concern particularly for, but not limited to, women themselves.¹ In fact, this interest in women's participation in politics has involved international and local organisations, especially in cases where 'political empowerment' projects receive substantive financial support. As described in chapter two, Jordan is the sixth largest recipient of US aid, and although the majority of resources are funnelled into military and security assistance, women's empowerment activities are an easy option. The mushrooming of activities directed at women's empowerment projects increased especially after the attacks of 11 September 2001, and developed in Jordan as well as other countries in the region² (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009a-b; Richter-Devroe, 2009; Jad, 2004; Mojab, 2007; Kandiyoti, 2007). These activities are often known as 'democracy promotion', 'good governance' or 'capacity-building' training, and in the Jordanian context they target female candidates for parliamentary or municipal elections.

The NDI and the IRI continue to be the major international actors in Jordan, and collaborated with local implementers³ in relation to female candidates' empowerment before the 2010 parliamentary elections.⁴ Most of the female candidates I interviewed considered these two organisations to be the main 'international institutions' in the field of women's leadership training. Local organisations were also involved in

¹ See chapter three for a longer discussion of the obstacles and experiences of female candidates before the 2010 parliamentary elections.

² The increase of funding in Jordan was also related to donors' location in that country in order to fund activities for Iraqi refugees. However, these donors have recently reoriented their work towards Jordanian organisations (personal interview with activist, London, 15 November 2012).

³ As I will discuss in the final chapter of this thesis, not all of the organisations in Jordan collaborate with the IRI and NDI. Two women's organisations, the JWU and the AWO, boycott them. These and other organisations took the political stand of refusing US funds after the war on Iraq in 2003.

⁴ Held on 9 November 2010.

programmes that addressed female candidates, particularly the country's main women's organisations.⁵ Women's participation in these leadership training sessions is high; although, as I will discuss throughout the chapter, the reasons for this participation are diverse, not only has financial and donors' support influenced the mushrooming of these activities, but the demand for these programmes from women at the grassroots is increasing. Twenty-five of the 26 female candidates I interviewed had participated in at least one of the training sessions organised by local and international organisations. Participation in IOs' training programmes is higher than in local training: 25 women had participated in international organisations' programmes, while 17 of the 25 had participated in local organisations' activities. This difference may be related to the supposed lack of trust in local women's organisations, as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter five.

Starting from an understanding of what women's interests in and expectations of leadership training are, throughout this chapter I aim to analyse selected international and local organisations' reasons, aims and agendas for activities organised before the 2010 parliamentary elections in Jordan. Drawing on interviews I conducted with practitioners in selected international and local organisations and female candidates participating in these programmes, and on my own participation in some of the activities, I explore how empowerment and gender mainstreaming have been operationalised and translated into practice at the international and local level.⁶ Focusing on specific projects run by the organisations in question concerning women's political training for the 2010 elections, and comparing international and local practices, I will delve into practitioners' different understandings of empowerment, and I will discuss whether social change has been a motivation behind such projects. Moreover, by addressing the ways in which gender has been conceptualised and integrated into selected institutions, I will question whether the transformative potential of the organisations' projects forms part of their broader

⁵ For an analysis of the women's organisations in the country, refer to chapter two. The activities promoted by local organisations will be further discussed throughout this chapter. The relationships among and between female candidates, MPs and women's organisations will be discussed in chapter five.

⁶ As the concepts of empowerment and gender mainstreaming have been discussed and debated in greater detail in chapter one, here I refer to empowerment as the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. In Kabeer's understanding of the concept, empowerment entails change (Kabeer, 2005: 14). In line with Rai (2008), I understand gender mainstreaming as a 'process of gender democratization, including women and their own perception of their political interests and political project into the policy-making processes' (72).

agenda. Since women's experiences are central to my research, I will focus on female candidates' concerns and feedback on political training, and I will address the question of whether training activities reflect women's expectations, contributing with a bottom-up analysis to literature on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. I will conclude the chapter with some emerging recommendations for political empowerment projects.

Reflections on women and gender interests

As explained in greater detail in chapter one, women's interests are distinct from women's gender interests (Molyneux, 1985: 232). Interests have to be understood not in an essentialist way, but as historically and culturally constituted as well as politically and discursively constructed; thus when I use the term 'interests', I am referring to specific gender interests. One of my first questions during interviews and discussions with female candidates related to the reasons why they had decided to participate in these training programmes. Learning more skills, tools and techniques in order to run a more effective campaign was one of the main practical and technical reasons for participating in such activities for many of the female candidates I interviewed. Seham, a middle-aged woman and lawyer from Jerash – the mother of three children, and a candidate in the 2003 elections as well – was very clear about her participation in training organised by international and local organisations, as she told me while we were enjoying tea in her office: 'I was expecting to learn practical skills, and it was like this: how to dress, how to smile, how to convince people to vote for me' (Jerash, 5 February 2011). Similarly, Kawthar – a middle-aged woman, the mother of five children and the vice-president of the Family Guidance and Awareness Centre⁷ in Zarqa – was very interested in learning the practical tools to run an effective campaign, since it was the first time she had been a candidate, as she told me in her office: 'I wanted to learn skills such as how to communicate in public... and how to run a campaign, gaining more votes' (Zarqa, 2 February 2011). Kawthar had participated only in activities promoted by local organisations. Other women I interviewed said that being a candidate for the first time had pushed them to learn new

⁷ The centre was established in 1996, focusing on social work, especially with families and women. It deals with violence against women, youth and community rehabilitation. It is a non-governmental organisation (Personal interview with Kawthar, Zarqa, 2 February 2011).

skills and tools to run for parliament. This was the case with Fayza from Irbid, who has been involved in volunteer work with her community for the past 30 years. While drinking strawberry juice in the colourful living room of her house in Irbid, referring to her participation in activities with the IRI, the NDI and a local organisation, she told me:

Since it was the first time I was running for candidacy, I was looking to get more information on the process and to learn how to communicate with voters. I was also hoping to find strategies on how to advocate, but yes, the main reason that pushed me to participate in such activities was to build my own skills (Irbid, 16 May 2011).

At first glance, Seham, Kawthar and Fazyza's interests in participating in training could be perceived as practical, in line with Molyneux's analysis (1985) of gender interests, which differentiates between strategic and practical interests. Theoretically, practical interests reflect women's immediate and contained demands for better conditions of work, childcare, housing and so forth. These interests do not challenge the wider framework of patriarchal power structures (Rai, 2008: 77) or the broader political context in which women live and operate. But were the women I interviewed not already challenging the status quo? In particular, is the very act of participating in political life not a challenge to unequal power relations and gender hierarchies within society?

Dr Sabah, the manager of the Karak Educational Directory, was the first woman to attain this position in the south of Jordan. I met her only once, but we talked for several hours. Like many of the other candidates I met, Dr Sabah is extremely passionate about her work and her involvement in politics. I have referred to Dr Sabah in the previous chapter, since her story was particularly powerful in revealing that the counting of votes is often unclear in a system where corruption and patronage persist. As she was already aware of such difficulties and obstacles even before election day, Dr Sabah's participation in 'capacity-building' training was in order to find solutions to the situation, as she explained to me: 'I participated only in activities with the NDI... and I wanted to learn how to run the campaign, how to get money in a suitable way, how to manage the election day, and especially how to behave with those people

that act illegally during election day' (Amman, 18 January 2011).⁸ Dr Sabah's account reflects some of the main hurdles female and male candidates face during their campaigns, as I explained in the previous chapter, especially when patronage support is weak. Her interests go beyond technical skills, trying to find ways of challenging the existing social order and power relations within society. In this sense Dr Sabah's needs could be perceived as strategic. As Molyneux (1985: 233–234; 1998: 235) argues, strategic interests imply an explicit questioning of the existing gender order and power relations. Strategic needs are formulated on the basis of an analysis of women's subordination to men. In Dr Sabah's case, her willingness to challenge the pre-existing social order might be perceived as a strategic interest; the same could also be said of Seham, Kawthar and Fayza, given their willingness to become elected women in parliament, thus challenging the prevailing status quo of politics as a male arena.⁹

Seham, Kawthar, Fayza and Dr Sabah's experiences are not representative of all of the 134 female candidates who ran for parliament in the 2010 elections. But their different backgrounds, experiences and expectations of participation in 'capacity-building' programmes help me to introduce and analyse the extent to which political and leadership training took female candidates' interests into consideration.

The NDI and IRI's operationalisation of empowerment

Only once while in the field did I have the chance to understand the dynamics between different institutions, international and local. Thanks to the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) – a political foundation closely associated with Germany's Christian Democratic Union, which contributes to the 'promotion of democracy, the rule of law and a social market economy' in Jordan¹⁰ – I began the creation of my network. As discussed above, the NDI and the IRI are the two major international institutions that provide training and activities for political empowerment in the country. I therefore decided to start from there.

⁸ Dr Sabah is referring to the practice of so-called political money, which consists in buying and selling votes. See chapter three for a broader discussion of the topic.

⁹ As I will explain in chapter five, not all of the women I interviewed participated in the candidacy process because they wanted to challenge the existing social order. Some wanted only the prestige of the position or a chance to get their tribe or family represented in parliament; they therefore perceived the training programmes as being merely of technical use.

¹⁰ <http://www.kas.de/jordanien/en/about/> [accessed 12 February 2013].

The NDI and the IRI define themselves on their websites and brochures as ‘nonprofit, nonpartisan organization[s]’¹¹ that support, promote and advance democratic institutions worldwide. While they are not legally under the control of the Democratic (NDI) or Republican (IRI) parties, they are ‘indistinguishable’ from them (WaNgugi, 2008: 21). A look at the boards of directors of the two organisations reveals that they both have members who are directly connected to the parties in question, such as US Senator John McCain, who is chairman of the IRI. Moreover, if one looks at the history of the organisations’ international activities, it is fairly clear that they are firmly linked to their parties: Naiman (2009), writing for the Huffington Post, denounced the IRI for supporting the 2004 coup in Honduras and raised questions about the NDI’s involvement. According to its website, the IRI engages in what it calls the ‘consolidation of democracy’. It facilitates the coming together of opposition parties, human rights organisations, workers’ unions, women’s organisations and student groups. However, as WaNgugi shows (2008) with particular reference to IRI projects in Latin America, these activities appear to be controversial. In Haiti in 2002 and 2003, the IRI helped consolidate the opposition to the democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and the ‘US ambassador to Haiti at the time suggested that the IRI was instrumental in Aristide’s downfall’ (WaNgugi, 2008: 22). As explained in chapter two, both the IRI and the NDI receive funding from USAID and the NED: this in itself is deeply problematic, because there is the risk that they will systematically impose the US government’s agenda through their funding.

The NDI has sponsored ‘democratic development’ programmes in Jordan since 1993, and has maintained an office in the country since 2004. The focus has recently shifted to women’s political participation in parliament, municipal councils and civil society. During the first interview I conducted at their office (Amman, 6 December 2010), my respondent told me that the projects related to the political participation of women were sometimes conducted in collaboration with the al-Quds Centre for Political Studies, an independent research institute based in Amman; the JNFW, a semi-governmental organisation established and headed by Princess Basma; and the GFJW, a governmental organisation. Such partnerships serve primarily to facilitate the creation of a network within Jordan: for instance, the GFJW has offices in all 12 governorates, and this makes the identification of participants for the activities easier,

¹¹ Available at www.ndi.org [accessed 12 February 2013] and <http://www.iri.org/learn-more-about-iri/history> [accessed 12 February 2013].

especially for governorates in the south, which are less connected to the capital, Amman. Moreover, according to my respondent, through such vertical collaboration the NDI and local partners engage in dialogue to understand and emphasise what would be the most appropriate projects to develop.

In relation to the projects organised for the 2010 elections, along with election monitoring activities,¹² the NDI focused on female candidates through the so-called women ‘candidate training programme’.¹³ The programme involved more than 100 women who were considering running for parliament, and focused on campaign strategy development, communications and outreach. Twelve of the 13 women who were elected had participated, as was pointed out quite clearly during the first interview I conducted at the NDI office (Amman, 6 December 2010). Candidates also learned about campaign structure, voter identification, and how to organise election day ‘get-out-the-vote’ efforts. ‘We work with individuals and for individuals and we aim at reaching individuals,’ my respondent at the NDI office told me, ‘and we work especially outside Amman, in the north, centre and south of the country’ (Amman, 6 December 2010). During the same meeting she stressed that they were trying to be a ‘grassroots’ organisation, albeit with an international structure. The activities planned for the 2010 parliamentary elections started right after the announcement of the election date¹⁴ at the beginning of 2010, and only few months were available before voting day in November of that year. Alongside their main programme they also organised a conference in Amman and events in six governorates in order to explain the new temporary election law.¹⁵ However, one of the main strengths of the NDI’s activities, according to the accounts of the female candidates I interviewed, was the opportunity to hold individual consultations between candidates and NDI staff, both before and during the campaign, to provide personalised guidance on issues relevant to their specific campaigns.

One of the crucial aspects of my research was to understand how practitioners perceived notions of empowerment and gender mainstreaming. The definitions of

¹² During the 2010 and 2013 elections the NDI sent an international observation delegation to monitor the electoral process, (<http://www.ndi.org/2013-jordan-elections> [accessed 14 February 2013]).

¹³ Respondent at NDI, Personal Interview, Amman, 6 December 2010.

¹⁴ King Abdullah dissolved parliament on 23 November 2009. However, the date of the elections was not announced until early 2010.

¹⁵ Civil society and candidates contested the temporary election law for its problematic division of districts and virtual constituencies, and particularly for the one-person one-vote system. See chapter three for a detailed explanation of the election law.

empowerment that I collected during the interviews were very closely related to the types of activities that each organisation was planning. In the case of projects focused exclusively on capacity-building and leadership skills, such as those organised by the NDI, the understanding of empowerment was related to the provision of tools and skills: 'Empowerment is the way we give women and civil society the *right* tools and the experience in order to learn how to do something. Empowerment is connected to the concept of capacity-building,' according to my respondent at the NDI (emphasis added, Amman, 6 December 2011).

As Eyben and Napian-Moore (2009) point out in their analysis of the use of words such as 'empowerment' and 'gender equality' in international development practices, 'opportunities' and 'potential' are frequent descriptors of empowerment. Indeed, during the second interview I conducted with the project director at the NDI, she explained the concept as a guarantee of opportunities for open dialogue: 'We build capacity-building... we try to introduce people to different processes that they can take or not. But at least they think about it. We open up a space for women to work: it's not just increasing skills. We create opportunities for dialogue, an open space,' she stressed (Amman, 12 April 2011). Although my second interview at the NDI was more in-depth than the first, the attention to capacity-building and skills remained one of the priorities, together with the desire to export certain values – 'democratic ones'. Giving the *right* tools presumes, first, that the tools an institution is providing are those that will best help the recipients, and second, that the institution knows what is *right* and *not right* for participants. There is a risk of having preconceptions about women's interests, in that a unilateral decision about what is 'good for women', coming from the top and from a limited number of 'experts', can end up framing empowerment as a 'power to' intervention.¹⁶ Most importantly, to what extent does this approach take into consideration the intersections between different classes, religions, tribal relationships and levels of education? This question will need further analysis.

The IRI has been working in Jordan since 2005, and has focused on 'connecting citizens and government by promoting good governance, strong political parties, and

¹⁶ As described in chapter one, starting from Mayoux's (1998) analysis of empowerment, there are four dimensions to the concept: 'power within', which refers to changes in confidence and consciousness; 'power to', which implies an increase in skills and abilities, including income earning and access to markets and networks; 'power over', which refers to changes in power relations within households, in communities and at the macro level; and 'power with', which implies the organisation of the powerless to enhance individual abilities and the abilities to challenge power relations.

public opinion research'.¹⁷ More recently, it has addressed the development of political parties throughout the country's 12 governorates, along with election monitoring.¹⁸ Focusing mainly on parties,¹⁹ the IRI does not use intermediary local organisations, because it directly contacts parties and governorates, through which it meets participants. With regard to activities before the 2010 elections, the organisation held debate sessions 'where everyone, as in the US and UK, can ask the candidate some questions, and debate is open to the public,' according to the man responsible for party projects at the IRI office (Amman, 30 January 2011). The IRI supported the creation of women's committees within the parties, and facilitated interaction between women in political parties and local councils. They also organised so-called school campaigns, which were mainly skills-based training focusing on the media. This programme was aimed at male and female candidates, and eight of the 13 women who made it into parliament had participated – this was underlined as an achievement during the interview. Campaign management was another skill taught during the training programmes, and one-on-one consultancy sessions were also provided.

As for the NDI's understanding of the concept of empowerment, the US resident at the IRI stressed the importance of creating a dialogue between the IRI and its participants: 'Empowerment is helping people determine what is important to them. You establish what is most important to you, now go and do it. It is not giving people money, it is having a dialogue' (Amman, 30 January 2011). This conceptualisation reflects the IRI activities in which they provide one-on-one sessions with candidates. However, one Jordanian consultant on gender issues who works for the IRI focused not on opportunities for dialogue, but rather on the provision of capacity-building skills: 'Empowerment is raising awareness of capacity-building for men and women to be able to reach their goals' (Salt, 2 March 2011). Attention to life goals is highlighted in Eyben and Napian-Moore's analysis (2009) as another common aspect of empowerment, and this was stressed by my last respondent at the IRI, the man in charge of programmes related to political parties: 'Empowerment is to let people

¹⁷ Available at <http://www.iri.org/learn-more-about-iri/history> [accessed 12 February 2013].

¹⁸ During the 2010 and 2013 elections the IRI sent an observation delegation to monitor the electoral process, (<http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-announces-delegation-observe-jordan%E2%80%99s-parliamentary-elections> [accessed 14 February 2013]).

¹⁹ Not all political parties agree to work with the IRI. The most influential parties, such as the Islamic Action Front, not only refuse to work with them, but have also attacked the IRI and the political parties who do work with them (personal interview with independent activist, Amman, 23 April 2011).

know what their role is within society. To let people know that they have a goal, and to let them know how to reach it' (Amman, 30 January 2011). The point of commonality between the three interviews lies in the idea that people have a life goal, and once they reach it, they feel empowered. In this there seems to be an individualistic understanding of life goals and decision-making, rather than of their also being a collective effort.

NDI and IRI activities seem to be limited to the promotion of training in technical and leadership skills, with the exception of specific events organised by the NDI and local organisations that aimed to explain the election law. Learning skills and tools, gaining self-confidence and receiving support are among female candidates' first expectations before they participate in these training programmes. Thus the NDI and IRI's projects apparently reflect the women's expectations. But to what extent do women benefit from these programmes? And is a focus on 'capacity-building' enough to 'empower' women politically? Most importantly, for what reasons are leadership training programmes and activities often conducted in isolation from other demands for social justice and equality?

It was not clear to me whether women were considered to be competent but socially constrained, or to be 'passive clients in need of enlightenment' (Kabeer, 1994: 234): in either case, women are seen as lacking something. According to Longwe (2000), such training programmes implicitly blame women for their lack of access to resources, and for their lack of participation because of their supposed lack of confidence and leadership skills. Could the exclusive attention to and accent on skills and capacity-building just be a way of neutralising a political issue by proposing a technocratic response to it?

Beyond training

During my fieldwork, I was extremely pleased to participate in an event organised by Vital Voices in February 2011 in Amman, where a number of activists (including some men) from different countries in the region, as Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen and Iraq, had the chance to come together, discuss advocacy campaigns and start their own national campaigns with the financial support of the organisation. Vital Voices is a US-based non-governmental organisation that supports women leaders and social entrepreneurs around the globe. I happened to have learned about the workshop

through one of the female candidates I had interviewed. The workshop lasted four days, and it was a combination of training in team-building and the use of social media, success stories from advocacy campaigns in Morocco and Jordan, and group consultations on the new campaigns. I was somewhat sceptical about the exclusively technical training – and I was not alone in this. After a training session on the use of social media for political activism, which had been extremely detailed on its technical and professional aspects, a participant from Yemen complained to me that the seminar had not addressed issues such as ‘how to formulate messages considering different contexts and audiences’, and she continued: ‘I know how to use Facebook or I can learn how to create a blog, but I need to know how I can speak up in an effective way, without endangering myself and my family’ (Amman, 21 February 2011). Her comment clearly demonstrates that her interest was a strategic one.

I very much appreciated that the main aim of the workshop was to enable the delegations from different countries to understand and choose the topic they considered most relevant to the needs of their society so as to start their advocacy campaigns. ‘We are not going to be the one who is going to be driving the campaign. We can provide the tools, but we can’t establish their goals,’ Christine, the programme manager of Vital Voices, told me during an interview after the workshop (Amman, 23 February 2011).

I was included in the Jordanian delegation: seven women from different backgrounds, including politics, business, the media and women’s rights activism, who were extremely enthusiastic at having this opportunity. Gender justice was their main motivation and motto, and challenging inequalities was their goal. It was difficult for them to come to a conclusion within such a limited time frame, but what made me feel that I was in the right place was that all their ideas started from the needs of the women they dealt with on a daily basis. The majority of these women were not members of Jordan’s main women’s organisations, but they saw this event as an opportunity to challenge gender inequalities and to push the government into action. Their dissatisfaction with the role of women in society led them to focus on a common aim: although they knew it was going to be a small campaign, in terms of both financial support (US\$25,000 had been allocated for this campaign) and their own time and resources (all of them also had full-time jobs), they knew they could promote change. They chose to campaign for a ‘family-friendly’ workplace, planning

to contact ministries and local councils in order to push for the establishment of nurseries in certain workplaces.²⁰

I particularly appreciated this workshop: unlike many of the IRI and NDI's activities, it was not a short one-off intervention, and it tried to go beyond mere technical skills. Enabling participants themselves to decide where to focus their campaign, on the basis of their connection to everyday problems in the specific context in which they operate, could be a way to mobilise public action for gender equality in a transformative way. In this particular case, all of the women came from the middle and upper classes, were educated and were employed in high-level positions, and they reflected the interests of their particular life contexts. Going beyond technical training might be a means to tackle the political system and unequal power relations between men and women. But even if this vision is taken on board by organisations such as Vital Voices, this is not the case with the NDI and the IRI. For this reason, it is important to understand the real goal behind the NDI and IRI's activities. Is it the organisations' political agenda? Is it 'capacity-building'? Or is it women's empowerment? In the cases of the NDI and the IRI, their political agendas are a matter of record, as explained above: their close links with the Democratic and Republican parties respectively, together with their connections to USAID and the NED in terms of funding, cannot be hidden, although during my interviews these aspects never came up and the non-partisan nature of the organisations was deeply underlined. It is therefore important to understand whether a transformative approach is employed in the IRI and NDI's missions.

Discussing 'transformation'

Do the NDI and IRI's activities imply social change? This was one of the questions I was asking myself while listening to my interviewees and participating in certain activities.²¹ In order to understand whether transformation was possible, I investigated

²⁰ After the Jordanian delegation launched the project, two members of the group, Randa Naffa and Lara Ayoub, registered the campaign, dubbed SADAQA (<https://www.facebook.com/sadaqajo> [accessed 12 March 2013]), as an NGO in order to continue its advocacy work, (<http://www.vitalvoices.org/blog/2012/08/dispatch-jordan-ground-sadaqa> [accessed 12 March 2013]).

²¹ I did not have the chance to participate in any of the pre-election activities, but I had the opportunity to be involved in a workshop with the NDI with female candidates after the elections, and in a workshop with Vital Voices on the participation of women in the 2011 revolutions. Unfortunately, I was never allowed to participate in other activities.

the aims of such activities, what informed them, and how they were integrated into the broader development scene in Jordan.

During preliminary discussions with interviewees, it became apparent that attention was given to participants' needs and feedback. Indeed, during the first interview I conducted at the NDI office, my respondent told me: 'Before each project we do a programme assessment, we meet with activists, with women in the media and with women's organisations, in order to understand their interests' (Amman, 6 December 2010). During the interview with the party project officer at the IRI, the importance of women's needs was also outlined: 'We start from what they [women activists] need, from what they demand. They are activists, they are part of their communities, they know what they need, and we listen to them' (Amman, 30 January 2011).

However, when I asked why they focus on women, on political participation and on these activities, I received completely different answers. For both the NDI and the IRI the enhancement and promotion of democracy are their primary goals, 'through the right tools' and 'without imposing anything'. Their agendas are clear: support for and strengthening of democratic institutions for the NDI, and the advancement of freedom and democracy for the IRI. For the NDI, when it comes to women's projects, their activities seek to increase the number of women in decision-making positions, because 'women are half of the population, and women need to have the same percentage as men as representatives just because of that' (Amman, 6 December 2010). The IRI takes the same approach, underlining the importance of having large numbers of women in politics: 'There is a small number of women in political parties and we want to increase that number' (Amman, 30 January 2011).

International practices and institutions across the world are demanding higher numbers of women in politics, and not just in the Middle East, as the discussion in the previous chapter of the introduction of gender quotas also revealed. However, the focus on numbers and statistics runs the risk of robbing empowerment of its transformative potential.²² Tadros (2010) uses case studies from the MEPI's work in the region and from the women's movement in Egypt to point out that there is a preference to conceptualise and operationalise empowerment as 'power to', and to a lesser extent as 'power within'. Thus the 'lack of support for projects involving a

²² The different theoretical conceptualisations of empowerment, together with its transformative potential, are discussed in the first chapter of the thesis. See also notes 6 and 16 in this chapter.

power over dimension or power with is reflective of the general trend toward the depoliticisation of empowerment' (Tadros, 2010: 236). This depoliticisation is evident in the willingness to train women in campaigning skills but not to address either the environment in which they operate, which might undermine any initiative they pursue, or their transformative potential. This was highlighted by my respondent at the NDI, who said: 'We are just interested in empowering women's political skills and in increasing their number in parliament' (Amman, 6 December 2010). The idea was mentioned that women might contribute to the enhancement of women's rights and policies once elected, but to try to push candidates in that direction was not part of the programmes. The political dimension of the problem seems to get overlooked; the interest in increasing women's access to politics, offering female participants more resources and skills, only addresses a superficial aspect of gender inequality. Agreeing with Longwe (1998), I argue that these training programmes could enable participants to recognise the political and ideological dimensions of gender inequality, through what she calls the 'conscientisation' process (Longwe, 1998: 21) – becoming able to step outside the patriarchal culture and adopt a more feminist consciousness.

The NDI and the IRI are consistent in their understandings of their goal to strengthen democracy, but will this attitude lead to social change? I argue that there are two main aspects that may lead empowerment projects to fail, with particular reference to the case of political leadership training in Jordan.

First, as Kabeer argues (2004) and as explained in chapter one, one of the requirements for empowerment to be transformative consists in having a long-term agenda and plan, avoiding activities that promise quick results. One of the most widespread criticisms I heard from women participants concerned the length of the training: usually activities are concentrated in a short period of time, and are provided only three or four months before election day.

I discussed this issue with two candidates, Ahlam and Hind, in a café in the south of Amman. Sometimes they would talk over each other because of their excitement during the discussion. It was challenging to try to get them to speak in turn: they would interrupt to support each other, or even to answer back. Referring to the NDI's activities in particular, they agreed that such trainings could be organised in advance, as Ahlam told me: 'I think they [the NDI] need to start to do these trainings and workshops at least four years before the elections' (Amman, 1 February 2011). Furthermore, more than one woman revealed to me that often several organisations

would offer activities and training during only the last few months before the elections, when candidates are extremely busy and do not always have the time to dedicate to the training. This was the case with Dr Sabah, the candidate from Karak. Dr Sabah found it very difficult to manage her work schedule, her campaign and her participation in such activities: ‘They [the NDI] offered the training in the last two months before the elections... A candidate has not a lot of free time before the elections. The trainings should last at least six months or one year. Two months are not enough’ (Amman, 18 January 2011). On the one hand, female participants complain that a longer project is necessary, especially because of the lack of time during the last few months of a campaign. On the other hand, I would suggest that such activities could be made part of a broader project, particularly in order to raise political awareness among women and men. As Sekhon (2006) demonstrates in her study of women’s political participation in India, a long-term and structured project will help to challenge ‘entrenched traditional power structures and renegotiate power at institutional, collective, interpersonal, and personal levels’ (120). Short bursts of intervention cannot affect the strategic interests of women who want to bring about social change. The lack of a long-term programme, and the consequent organisation of activities right before election day, was also pointed out by some of the practitioners I met. Randa, a freelance gender consultant, revealed to me at her office at the UNDP:

Trainings are very short, and the problem is that they are not part of a longer and comprehensive programme/strategy: they are not part of a well-defined thought programme. There are no two-year programmes. The organisations just do workshops to feed into the trainings. And this is often a matter of a lack of proper and enough funding (Amman, 8 March 2011).

It was there that I also met two women working at the gender unit of the UNDP, and I managed to conduct a short interview with them as well. The executive manager of the UNDP’s gender unit supported Randa’s statement, referring to the activities they had organised in collaboration with the parliament: ‘In terms of the orientation and education of MPs, it is impossible to educate them only through one training; there is a need for a long-term programme’ (Amman, 8 March 2011). The realisation

that there is a need for long-term projects is there; however, this lack of any long-term plan is usually justified in terms of the difficulties of getting sufficient funding. Long-term strategies would help to break down the social structures of inequalities between, yet not exclusively, genders, classes and ethnicities.

Second, there is a risk that such organisations will impose certain ‘democratic values’ that are connected not to Jordan’s specific social context, but rather to the broader political agenda behind the organisation themselves. Ala, the passionate young woman activist and volunteer for local organisations, told me about a training session she had participated in with the NDI before the elections: ‘They [the NDI] are not selling us democracy; they are selling us their democracy. But I don’t want their democracy. What might work with you, does not work necessarily with me’ (Amman, 4 April 2011). Other female candidates I interviewed who had participated in these ‘capacity-building’ programmes stressed the same point. Dr Sabah was clear about the risk of the imposition of certain ‘democratic values’, when she emotionally told me:

They [the NDI] trained us, but the trainings they gave us are not suitable for our community. They considered us as if we were Americans, but we are not citizens of the United States. They did not know anything about our traditions, our circumstances. I told them that it would have been better to have some persons from Jordan who had lived the experience of the elections and train other people who want to run for office. For instance, they taught us how to fundraise: they told us that you can ask for money from people close to your family for the campaign; [...] but it is a source of shame for us in Jordan to take money from people living in my community (Amman, 18 January 2011).

Dr Sabah’s comments and frustrations resonate with El-Kassem’s (2008) critique of the ‘democracy training’ offered to women’s NGOs in Iraq. El-Kassem (2008: 130) notes that the curriculum of these training courses is strikingly similar to those being employed in other parts of the world; this could be perceived as the IOs’ ‘transnational strategy’ for promoting democracy. Women are the instruments through which ‘their democracy’ can be exported. El-Kassem’s critique was

confirmed by my respondent at the NDI, who pointed out during my first interview with her that they use the same schemes and techniques for workshops in different countries: ‘We did a campaign simulation with women from Bahrain: we usually use the same techniques in different countries – we study the training skills for an imaginary country, and then we apply it to each country’ (Amman, 6 December 2011). The idea of strategising for an imaginary country certainly does not take into consideration the specificities of particular national contexts. The differences between types of governments or regimes, the structures of society and the perceptions of women’s role within it, are not taken into account. Failing to put planning in its historical context, separating the content from the context, leads to the depoliticisation of planning, resulting in what has been defined as the ‘applied’ methodology²³ in development planning traditions (Moser, 1993: 85), which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s and is still widely adopted by donor agencies. This practice has been widely criticised, because it focuses more on the means of planning rather than on the end product, assuming that a distinctive type of planning thought and action can exist without reference to any particular object. Thus its adoption within any social context is both ‘contextless’ and ‘contentless’ (Thomas, 1979 in Moser, 1993: 86).

Although knowledge of Jordan’s socio-political and economic context is necessary in order to understand the implications of ‘promoting democracy’ in the country, I do not think that that is enough. In the context of women’s political participation, female candidates are not only ‘women’ or ‘candidates’, but they also come from different social classes, have diverse ethnic origins, adhere to different religions, and have various relationships with their families or tribes. Usually women as a ‘whole group’ are assumed to be the main recipients of empowerment programmes. However, women do not constitute a homogeneous category. In particular, women in Jordan differ in more ways than between being a ‘full’ Jordanian, of Palestinian or Iraqi origin, or Muslim or Christian, as outlined in the thesis introduction. International development institutions, as well as some local organisations, often seem to assume that women are a coherent group or category. The assumption that all women somehow constitute a homogeneous group binds women together into the ‘sociological notion of the sameness of their oppression’ (Mohanty, 1988: 65).

²³ The ‘applied’ tradition characterises planning as a set of rational procedures and methods for decision-making, consisting of several logical stages: problem definition, data collection, formulation of goals and objectives, and the design of alternative plans (Moser, 1993: 85).

If female candidates are considered a homogeneous category, with no recognition of their different problems, needs and interests, the transformative potential of empowerment is neglected and empowerment depoliticised. This depoliticisation is evident in the disconnection between what the IRI and the NDI teach and promote as ‘democracy’ and what women can actually use. This lack of understanding of different ‘cultures’ and priorities within Jordanian society seemed to be perceived by my interviewees in a similar way – exemplified in Dr Sabah’s comments on fundraising – and reflected their difficulties in using what they had learned during the training sessions. This is particularly the case for women living outside Amman, where tribal and family pressures are much stronger and more socially entrenched, as in the case of Zachieh, a candidate from Madaba:

One thing I found difficult was how to implement the theoretical information that we were learning. The educational/knowledge level was good, but using it, that was hard. For example, the slogans and media statements they taught us are not suited for our society, especially outside Amman; you need to go to a different level when talking to the tribe. Slogans and media statements have no worth in our society. If a tribe wants to support someone, the people will vote for them, independently of what they believe in and say. All the people who won were selected by their own tribe, not because of their statements. (Madaba, 4 February 2011).

Zachieh is raising a valid point, one that is also discussed in the previous chapter. In a context where tribal support is strong, and is still a basic necessity if one wishes to attain a position of power, the role that women might play in the political arena is often overlooked or neglected. Teaching her how to formulate an effective statement might be useful for improving a woman’s ability to communicate her message; but finding the proper ways to communicate with the tribe or community would elevate the training to the level of challenging the patriarchal order and gender hierarchies within the political system. International organisations as the NDI and IRI state that they promote ‘democracy’, but their attention to the dynamics and the reasons why women are not elected could be taken further. Why do they not think of strategies for challenging the preconceived idea that politics is a male arena? Why do they not

focus on empowerment as a process of self-development and the ‘conscientisation’ of a woman’s own capacities?

The failure to employ a deeper analysis of the multiple difficulties and multifaceted obstacles that a woman who wants to run for parliament may face, or to understand the roots of these difficulties – i.e. the unequal power relations within society – derives, I think, from the IOs’ exclusive attention to practical needs related to skills and techniques, without properly recognising women’s wider social role. A study conducted in Nigeria by Erinle (1986) found that one training programme on basic health and nutrition only recognised the reproductive role of women, forgetting about their productive role and their need to earn an income. That training included the teaching of new recipes to be cooked in Western-style ovens. The majority of low-income women dropped out of the programme, preferring to cook their traditional food for sale. The training recognised women’s reproductive role and might well have met nutritional needs, assuming that the new recipes had a greater nutritional value than traditional food, but it failed to recognise women’s productive role and the applicability of what they had learned, which was the priority for the women themselves (Erinle, 1986 in Moser, 1993). In the case of leadership training, such organisations recognise the role of women as potential candidates, but forget (or choose to ignore) to challenge the wider context in which women live and the different roles that they play in society, failing to provide women with useful tools and strategies that they could use in their campaigns. Why is the focus on women’s skills so compelling? Why is there no interest in addressing the psychological and personal empowerment of women, rather than merely technical and practical skills? And why is there no focus on their male counterparts?

The neoliberal agenda informing democratisation processes is evident in the cases of the IRI and NDI. In light of their underemphasis on empowerment, I would argue that women’s needs are not their priority, and that the transformative potential of such projects is not taken into consideration. Referring to the impact of neoliberal agendas on Kurdish women’s organisations, Mojab (2007) shows that Kurdish women’s needs and an in-depth knowledge of Kurdish women have been overtaken by bureaucratisation, lack of transparency and lack of autonomy in the work of those organisations. Moreover, Al-Ali and Pratt (2009b: 84) have demonstrated that in Iraq, women’s empowerment has been instrumentalised by the US administration for its own foreign policy ends. Women’s needs were not the priority: even though large

amounts of money were poured in to fund ‘democracy training programmes’ and facilitate women’s political participation, basic needs such as the reconstruction of education, healthcare, water and electricity, and the maintenance of law and order were not on the agenda. Several women interviewed by Al-Ali and Pratt (2009b) stressed that these international development programmes should have been constructed through better engagement with Iraqi women activists in order to understand their needs first, and should not have started from ‘generic prescriptions of how to build civil societies’ (148).

Empowerment projects in the Middle East, and NDI and IRI activities in Jordan in particular, are shaped mostly by larger political and economic policy concerns, which follow the neoliberal agendas and global gender regimes of international bodies. As such their activities remain at the superficial level of increasing the numbers of women and filling out development reports, and do not properly take into consideration the transformative aim of empowerment itself. I am not asking for the IRI and the NDI to become ‘feminist’, but I argue that a perception of women that does not see them as ‘lacking something’, and a taking into consideration of gender interests, could be a starting point for transformative women’s empowerment. Having discussed international organisations’ approach to empowerment, I will now turn my attention to the question of how the concept is understood and operationalised at the local level.

Social change as understood by local organisations

In contrast to IOs, local organisations’ understanding of empowerment is more related to the idea of producing change, with an accent on outcomes rather than on the instruments and tools needed to attain one’s ‘life goal’. According to Eyben and Napian-Moore (2009), ‘empowerment is increasingly imbued with a theory of change’ (297), and in line with Kabeer (2005: 14) I consider empowerment as entailing social transformation. This conceptualisation of empowerment reflects the diverse activities that local organisations promoted for the 2010 elections.

The significant international focus on political empowerment in terms of funding is closely linked to the importance given to it by local organisations. Both because it attracts relatively ‘easy’ funding and for the purposes of the interests behind these projects, several local organisations planned activities for the 2010 parliamentary

elections. Resources and activities were not organised under any comprehensive or broader structured project, such as the ‘women’s movement.’²⁴ Each organisation had its own plan concerning the elections.

Even the JNCW, a semi-governmental organisation that supposedly serves as an umbrella body, worked independently of other organisations. The JNCW started a training programme for female candidates in June 2010. The activities focused mainly on media and strategy training: they organised around 20 sessions on how to deal with the media, how to present ideas in public, how to behave in front of the camera, how to write an agenda and how to deal with voters. ‘The need for this training came up from the previous trainings we had and what female participants asked us to work on,’ the project director at the JNCW told me (Amman, 21 November 2010). These training sessions were offered right across 12 governorates, in partnership with local organisations, which had responsibility for appointing the trainers. Through newspaper advertisements they were able to get 150 participants. Along with that activity, they also focused on political awareness among youth and people in general, addressing two distinct aspects. On the one hand, they wanted to highlight the importance of women’s votes and women’s contribution to political life as equal to that of men; on the other hand, they wanted to clarify the procedures set out by the temporary law regulating the elections. For these purposes, three events were organised in the north, west and south of the country to which everyone was welcome, with the aim of raising awareness among women voters, talking to them through a ‘common language’, and presenting success stories such as that of Toujan Faisal.²⁵ Their political awareness campaign was pursued through advertisements in posters and on the TV and radio in order to encourage women to vote, and this reflected the JNCW’s vision of empowerment, as the secretary general, Asma Khader, revealed to me during an interview at her office in Amman: ‘When our organisation advocates for women’s empowerment, it means that we aim at building self-confidence for women and awareness of women’s rights in society’ (Amman, 28 November 2010). In order to address not only women, but also society more broadly, the JNCW established an ‘emergency room’ consisting of an open phone line to

²⁴ For a discussion of the problematic subsumption of women’s organisations under the notion of a movement, refer to chapters two and five.

²⁵ Toujan Faisal was the first woman member of parliament, elected in 1993, and her story is often taken as example to encourage more women to participate in politics, especially within women’s organisations.

answer questions about the elections and the candidates' profiles. The JNCW also organised the Youth Tech Festival, which brought together around 150 young people to discuss their participation in the election process and how technology could be used to run a campaign. Unlike the NDI's and IRI's approaches, the JNCW combines technical skills training and events with projects to promote the importance of women's role in political life.

All of the main organisations that work on political empowerment and have national scope in terms of their participants and activities are 'royal' organisations, even if they define themselves as non-governmental ones. There were other two organisations of this kind that I wanted to contact: the GFJW and the JNFW. The GFJW serves as an umbrella organisation, with a network of 145 local organisations spread all over the country and an office in each governorate. Although I did not have the opportunity to collect very much material about this organisation, they have organised trainings sessions on capacity-building and leadership skills; however, they have done little work on awareness and advocacy campaigns, let alone encouraging open debate.

The JNFW is royal-sponsored organisation as well. When I went to the JNFW office in Amman, I detected a less informal atmosphere compared to the organisations I had visited previously, as described in chapter two. Samar, the project director at the JNFW, is a young woman activist and very passionate about her job; she was curious about my research and wanted to support me. I was pleased to hear from Samar that the JNFW had tried to concentrate on both voters and candidates with regard to their activities for the 2010 parliamentary election. Not only had they organised a variety of activities, but they had also tried to address different audiences. First they planned public meetings between voters and candidates in order to give an opportunity for open debate and discussion, as well as meetings for voters only in order to stress the importance of voting at such a crucial historical moment. 'Some people are not enthusiastic about participating in the elections. It is a citizen's right to vote and we wanted to motivate them,' Samar told me during our meeting at her office in Amman (13 January 2011). They organised workshops especially for female candidates that focused on practical tools such as communication and organisational skills. During the interview she stressed the 'uniqueness of our workshop', because, according to her, 'it was extremely needs-related.' She thought that the JNFW's approach was different compared to that of other local and international organisations. They aimed

to teach tools that women could use practically in their campaigns. She complained that there was a risk that the utility of such training would remain restricted to the theoretical level, without reaching the practical level – a criticism that female candidates often make in relation to the NDI and IRI's activities, as previously discussed. Samar gave an example of how such activities can be implemented by female candidates, and how they can be useful in practice:

We helped candidates to do a quick revision of their election campaign; we helped them to think or rethink what they had achieved until that moment – we did it in October and at the beginning of November. For instance, we discussed ways and possibilities of expanding and increasing volunteers' opportunities in their campaign, in order to overcome financial issues; and we helped participants to prepare a plan for election day (Amman, 13 January 2011).

Samar was extremely passionate about the activities she organised, and I could see this in her eyes and her smile when she told me about something that had happened to her in Karak:

During a workshop in Karak, a man was trying to manage the campaign of one of his sisters, and during a break he came to me and said: 'Please, please, stop the training, you are destroying us [men]. Through these trainings you are opening their [his sisters'] eyes; they are learning and they will learn how to organise their campaign. They won't need our help any more.' I was satisfied! (Amman, 13 January 2011).

This is how Samar considered that the training went beyond the merely theoretical level, addressing not only women participants, but also the people around them. That was her goal, and the anecdote above neatly summarised her idea of empowerment as a structured concept, as she stressed: 'Firstly, women need to know about their rights, how to access to their rights and to benefit from their rights' (Amman, 13 January 2011). The second step consists in knowing how to use the information one has

obtained: 'It is not enough to know your rights, but it is important to know how to use them' – evidently, the women in the workshop were benefiting from this. The third and final step towards empowerment, according to Samar, coincides with an ability to produce change, both in one's own life and in society. Samar's conceptualisation is a combination of 'power over' and 'power with': the first involves a direct and open contestation of the status quo after learning how to use one's personal rights; the second, focusing on collective and individual mobilisation with the purpose of inducing change, also involves a 'direct challenge to the existing hierarchies of power' (Tadros, 2010: 227). Samar's conceptualisation recalls Dr Sabah's expectations of participation in leadership training, since she wanted to find strategies to challenge the hierarchies of power within her tribe and community. This organisation appeared to be extremely connected to women on the ground: women's needs and requests came first, and this was happening thanks to their presence all over Jordan, especially in remote areas.

During interviews at the JNCW and the JNFW I finally began to hear phrases such as 'political awareness', 'the needs of the voters' and 'the needs of participants'. I heard similar words when I went to the JWU. Together with the AWO, the JWU did a great deal of work on advocacy and awareness campaigns. The first time I went there, I was welcomed as 'one of them'. The JWU has a completely different approach compared to the other major organisations in the country. As described in chapter two, it is an independent organisation, which developed out of a leftist political project. I went to the JWU more than once, and each time I spent long hours talking to the director, Nadia Shamrouk, a bold and passionate woman. Similarly to the JNFW, during the 2010 elections the JWU had preferred to focus on voters rather than candidates. 'There are a lot of other organisations that concentrate on candidates and no one on voters... We want to fill the gap,' Nadia told me during our first meeting (17 January 2011). She went on to explain other activities, which revealed that the JWU works with women as both voters and candidates on a continuous basis, rather than just at election time:

Our project for the elections lasted nine months, and it was divided into two parts. First we organised courses, with 15 women in each one, discussing what is the parliament? What are the role and function of parliamentarians? Do we have a 'real' parliament?

When we say that the parliament is weak, whom should we elect?
Second, we concentrated in the reform of the election law: we
created a five-person committee, and we are going to propose a new
election law, after consultations with other organisations and
experts in the field (Amman, 17 January 2011).²⁶

The interest in political awareness at the level of society in general is central to the JWU, particularly in relation to women, and the reason for this emerged very clearly when Nadia Shamrouk told me: ‘We would like to build a good *atmosphere* and *context*. We want to liberate women and society, and in order to do so we have to liberate both’ (emphasis added, Amman, 17 January 2011). The JWU not only addresses voters and candidates, but also organises training and seminars for its own staff on themes such as democracy, the occupation of Palestine, and civil society. Although the objective of this programme, as was explained to me while I was there, is to enable the staff to understand the politics and vision behind the JWU itself, this initiative also serves to educate the staff on topics that are extremely relevant to the organisation’s activities. The political background of the JWU gives it the chance to address issues that other local organisations do not.

This focus on social change was very clear when Nadia Shamrouk explained to me the JWU’s main vision: ‘We want to give women the chance to be able to make their own decisions, independently; women should be able to raise and gain their voice’ (Amman, 17 January 2011). In the same spirit, Leila Hamarneh, the project director at the AWO, who has been an activist for women’s rights for several years, told me: ‘Empowerment is raising awareness; it is creation of values; it involves teaching the sense of justice. We empower in order to mobilise’ (Amman, 11 January 2011). The understanding of the concept as a collective form of mobilisation is clear in Leila’s words. The transformative aspect of empowerment also came up during the interview with the young activist Ala, who underlined women’s opportunity to speak up on behalf of other women as a path for change when she enthusiastically told me: ‘Empowering women is to let them realise that they don’t have to follow, but they can lead. Giving them the space to do that. Opening a door to let them go through and allow them to speak up for other women’ (Amman, 7 April, 2011).

²⁶ In chapter three I address the role of the JWU in campaigning for a modification of the temporary election law.

In IOs' understanding of the concept, tools and skills seem to represent the final aim of their activities, alongside their own political agenda. However, local organisations consider skills and tools to be an instrument that must be brought together with knowledge, self-reliance and action; empowerment entails as an ultimate goal 'the ability of the disempowered to act collectively in their own practical and strategic interests' (Kabeer, 1994: 256).

Numbers, awareness and funding at the local level

The interest in increasing the number of women in political office is also shared by local organisations, and by most of the female candidates I interviewed; the argument that 'since women are half of the population they should be equally represented' is the most common rationale. However, the differences between IOs' and local organisations' approaches emerge when one asks *how* women's numbers might be increased in the political arena.

Most of the local organisations placed an emphasis on the *quality* of the candidates, and on the *capability* of women MPs to address and support women's rights once they had got into politics – something that never came up during my interviews with IOs. Moreover, the aims of local organisations, which revolved mostly around women's projects, were more related to women's ability to become an active part of their society, rather than to building a 'democratic' country. This is especially true of those organisations that considered empowerment as effective for change and mobilisation, such as Samar at the JNFW:

We aim to enable women to be aware of their rights, and to take a leading role in decision-making positions. We believe in a woman who can effectively contribute to sustainable development and in the realisation of a Jordanian society built on the principles of equality, justice and efficiency (Amman, 13 January 2011).

Nadia Shamrouk at the JWU also pointed out issues of equality, justice and respect, with a strong accent on the goal of mobilisation, and this was in line with the JWU's political agenda:

We aim to organise and unify women's efforts to protect their rights and achievements. We emphasise the role of women in society so that they will be able to practise their rights as citizens on the basis of equality, justice, equal opportunities and respect (Amman, 11 April 2011).

The connection to society is much more evident in local organisations. Although there are many criticisms and problems in the relationships between female candidates and some local organisations, which I will discuss in the final chapter of the thesis, some of the women I interviewed were very grateful for the activities organised by local organisations. As a form of appreciation of the work of local organisations, compared with the different approach employed by the NDI and IRI, Khawla, a candidate from Jerash and a very outspoken lawyer told me:

There have been some differences between the activities of IOs and local organisations. They have different aims and approaches. The activities of IOs are more generic, more focused on general skills. The activities of local organisations are more detailed. I learned how to deal with and talk to the community. These [local organisations'] activities were more connected with our society. They taught us how to enter families, how to reach communities, how to talk to people, especially if you live outside Amman (Jerash, 5 February 2011).

In Khawla's words and in the previous comments of women's rights activists, the transformative politics of local organisations and their desire to produce change through their participants are evident. Certainly, among women who are not interested in inducing change or challenging the status quo, learning skills and tools, gaining self-confidence, and receiving psychological and even financial support are their major expectations of the training provided by local and international organisations. However, among those women who consider these training programmes an opportunity to learn how to bring about change in their lives and within their communities, Jaleela, who lives in Jerash and was the first woman I interviewed, told

my translator and me that such activities are important, but there is still a need to dig deeper within the community and to promote political awareness programmes:

Women's organisations need to focus more on building capacity for women, as political and social workers. Women need to be more active in their society and community. If the organisations give them the strength and awareness of being good and believed activists in their communities, women will be trusted. The problem is that there is not enough attention to empowerment at the community level. The community, after seeing that a woman is empowered herself, would trust her and would vote for her. There is a need to be recognised in the community before gaining political support (Jerash, 16 December 2010).

Jaleela is raising a valid point that is also noted by Mohanty (1999) in the context of local government in India: 'once women become aware of the issues they try to execute programmes successfully and in the process their self-perceptions undergo change. This has a multiplier impact on the children, the family, the neighbourhood and the village' (31). We might learn from a successful experience in the field of women's political participation from India (Sekhon, 2006): employing a feminist approach, a local organisation called Aalochana enabled its members to engage in participatory research using dialogue and conversation, to develop a training programme that questioned the role of women within their community, and to create a network to 'sustain and promote progressive analysis and alternative political strategies' (Naples, 1998: 18, cited in Sekhon, 2006: 104). Sekhon's research findings have motivated several women's and other non-governmental organisations to work 'as catalysts for enabling participatory politics at the local level' (2006: 108) and to consider women the enriching half of society. In line with Sekhon's findings, Kawthar, the candidate from Zarqa, was very clear about the potential of these empowerment programmes: 'They [NGOs] were helping us not financially, but through raising our awareness of what we could do as women. In this sense these activities have been very useful' (Zarqa, 2 February, 2011). That was the first and only time a woman gave this as the reason for her satisfaction. Kawthar referred to the

activities of the JNFW and the JWU, which addressed political awareness in their programmes.

Although the GNFW is an exception, the other three major local organisations described do not focus only on training and capacity-building skills. Although their approaches differ from the activities of international organisations (as I will further discuss in the final chapter of the thesis), local women's organisations are more interested in addressing the awareness aspect of political empowerment, trying to move beyond technical skills. They therefore focus on strategic gender interests and the recognition of women's role in the political sphere. Although female candidates face many hurdles during their campaigns that no organisation can solve, I think that, in order to include women in the political arena in a more comprehensive and transformative way, it is necessary to address the surrounding context in which women operate, such as the voters and the community – which is what the three local organisations described are doing. But it is also apparent that a stronger collaboration between different organisations is necessary in order to use resources efficiently and to address participants more comprehensively. There is certainly a risk that organisations' internal agendas will prevail over women's interests and needs; this is the challenge that organisations face, especially when proper coordination between them is lacking, financial support is low and the state's co-optation is increasing (as I have described in chapter two and will further discuss in the fifth chapter). Indeed, the necessity of funding, coupled with a lack of structured long-term plans and programmes, has made some organisations lose sight of the transformative potential of their activities, as Jad (2004) has described with reference to the NGO-isation of women's organisations in Palestine. However, I argue that through the involvement of the entire community, including men and young people and not exclusively women, women's concerns and gender interests could become part of wider social debates: it is only through the spreading of gender-sensitive activities that look at gender needs and society in general that women will be listened to and supported.

From empowerment to gender equality

The integration of gender issues into both international and national institutions is a step towards the promotion and advancement of gender equality, at least in theory, as is outlined in chapter one in greater detail. Although gender mainstreaming and

women's empowerment are complementary strategies for achieving gender equality, during my interviews with practitioners in the field, empowerment was the most frequently mentioned word, coupled with gender equality as its complement. This shows that among international development practitioners there is a preference for using the word 'empowerment' rather than 'gender equality'.

During an interview with Randa, the independent gender consultant who works for UN bodies in Jordan, I heard the connection between gender and empowerment for the first and only time: 'Empowerment is the foundation, the essence of gender. Gender is the combination of the social, economical and psychological empowerment through which you can achieve equality' (Amman, 8 March 2011). Randa stressed that there is a need to focus on psychological empowerment, because women need to believe in themselves, and she gave an example:

I was in Wadi Araba for a workshop with a local organisation, in the south of Jordan. We expected to have middle-aged women participants but they ended up being in their 20s. Our workshop was designed for older women and we decided to change it. We started asking questions such as, 'who would you like to be?', 'what are your aspirations in life?'. Some of them started crying and I was shocked. Until that moment they had thought of themselves as an extension of their family, not as individuals, and those questions made them think differently. With those simple questions they realised that they were individuals and they could have their own lives. We also did the same with older women and the reaction was similar. This is to say that there are no organisations that address this type of psychological empowerment. Psychological support does not need to be a separate programme, but it should be mainstreamed into the main programme. Often psychological support came up only in relation to projects against violence or for rehabilitation, but we need self-awareness campaigns in other sectors of life also (Amman, 8 March 2011).

In line with Randa's statement, empowerment understood as 'power within', which refers to changes in confidence and consciousness, could go together with a different conception of women's role in society, as she continued:

Women are considered to be second-class citizens in our patriarchal society. There should be more awareness campaigns: how to speak out and how to respect themselves. We need to drastically change how we look at women's issues: it is no longer a women's issue, it is a society issue, a gender issue (Amman, 8 March 2011).

In relation to Randa's last point, having a clear idea of what equal opportunities imply leads to a conceptualisation of gender according to the organisations' agendas. Randa and I spoke a similar language in terms of academic concepts. However, this was not the case with other interviewees. When talking to practitioners I would ask for a definition of gender, and I would usually receive answers that did not reflect a proper understanding of the term; instead they related to the influence that gender might have on their projects. This might have been because of the difficulties of translating the concept from English into Arabic, as Shirin, the director of UN–WOMEN, pointed out:

When the word 'gender' appeared in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action for the first time, no one knew how to properly translate it into Arabic. We have preferred to use words such as 'equal opportunity' and 'equity' when talking to participants in our workshops, so that they can better understand what we are working on (Amman, 16 January 2011).

The implications of the translation of the term have been a challenge not only for organisations, but also for the Women's Studies Centre at the University of Jordan, which considered changing its name to the Gender Studies Centre, but postponed the decision because of possible misunderstandings of the term.²⁷ They did not want to be

²⁷ It is not part of this research to engage in debates around the translation of the word 'gender' into Arabic. However, misinterpretation might result from an understanding of the word as *jins* (sex) rather than *al-naw' al-ijtima'i* (social species/kind).

categorised as a centre that focuses its activities on sex and homosexuality. According to them, because of the translation issue, the term might be misinterpreted not only by men, but also by women.

In relation to practitioners' understandings of gender, sometimes I did not receive any definition at all, such as in the case of the NDI, where my interviewee argued that since they were an organisation that worked on women, gender was not taken into account: 'I can't give you an answer on this [the definition of gender] because we are not involved in gender issues, but we work on women's activities' (Amman, 12 April 2011). When I was able to get an answer, most of the time it was related to women's and men's roles in society with the final aim of achieving equality, as the Jordanian woman at the IRI told me: 'Gender refers to the role of men and women in society: it is our culture that put us [women] back. We need time in order to achieve equality' (Salt, 2 March 2011).

Many of the people in these organisations see gender as the biological quality of being male and female. But gender also refers to the social and cultural construction of masculinity and femininity. It can be seen in how we understand men's and women's different social roles, in the relationship between men and women, and in relationships among women and among men. My interviewees did not stress these relationships openly, and our discussions never reached an in-depth analysis of existing power relations, gender norms or social hierarchies. However, I did detect a desire to integrate men and young people into projects that have primarily focused on women, such as during the interview at the IRI, when I was told: 'We concentrate both on men and women. We have programmes specifically for women, but most of the time we have men and women participants in the same workshop' (Amman, 30 January 2011). This inclusiveness has led to the generation of discussion of the role of women and men in the political arena, in order to address the broader environment in which the organisation operates. Samar at the JNFW was clear on this when she said: 'In some trainings we had male and female participants, in order to encourage the discussion between them and in order to let women and men benefit from each other's experiences. From my point of view it is important to do trainings not only for women, but to include men as well' (Amman, 13 January 2011). Local organisations especially highlighted attention to the prevailing atmosphere and environment, and

this was in line with their conceptualisation of empowerment and social change, as Samar continued:

We want to raise awareness across the entire community about their [women's] rights. We want to reach men, women and young people; especially when we work towards women's empowerment we focus also on men and young people, so they can support women in their activities (Amman, 13 January 2011).

There is a need to understand that women's rights involve the entire community, as the president of the GFJW told me: 'We do not focus our activities only on women, we also train men, because it is important to enable men to be aware of women's issues as well. Women's rights are not only about women, but they concern the entire society, including men' (Amman, 14 November 2010). According to these explanations, gender issues seem to be related to women's issues, in the sense that it is from activities that address women that issues of gender may arise, as Hala at the GSF complained:

In Jordan, gender experts and women advocates think that gender mainstreaming is women's mainstreaming; it is not addressing gender issues at the core. This is one of the main reasons why gender mainstreaming has not been so successful. We as the GSF are engaging in research in order to look at gender issues from the perspective of men. We conducted a study to try to understand the main gender challenges within the private sector, and we found out that the private sector is unfriendly to gender issues. Some policies of some companies appear to be gender sensitive, but, in reality they are gender blind. We had a call for proposals for projects that focused on men's and boys' empowerment, but no one applied. Gender issues are not men's issues in our society. This is having an impact on the gender mainstreaming approach we are experiencing. It has always been an approach from the women's side. Women are disadvantaged, of course, but the issue is not just about women; it should be also about men (Amman, 20 December 2010).

The failure of gender mainstreaming policies is related not only to the difficulty of understanding the term 'gender', but also to the absence of any focus on policies that are targeted towards both men and women; the focus seems to be on women's mainstreaming rather than gender mainstreaming. Although there have been some improvements, as demonstrated by the interviews, in the sense that more men are getting involved in activities concerning women's rights, human rights and development issues, the trend appears to be to support disadvantaged women, and the concept of gender is still not well understood at its core. International and local institutions have an important role in terms of women's empowerment. In order to 'gender' their policies, such organisations could create the conditions and provide the necessary instruments and access to resources so that women can exercise their autonomy and self-empowerment as a process.

Emerging yet controversial recommendations

One of the main challenges for us as feminist researchers is to find ways to translate empowerment and gender mainstreaming processes not into technocratic logics, but into potentially transformative language. In order to get beyond the validation or criticism of such activities, both as a researcher and as an activist, I tried during my interviews to look for recommendations on the basis of female candidates' experiences. Ahlam was the first who gave me concrete ideas on this issue. She has been a trainer for several years in the field of business. We were discussing the topic in her cosy apartment in Amman, where I used to go often, since she lived by herself and invited me every other day. She introduced me to the idea of listening to more success stories from women who had made it into the political arena, as well as using more trainers from the country or the region:

Organisations could bring women who have previous experience in their local community and who have already been through the election campaign process and won. We want to know their experiences. How did they run? Why did they win? There is a need to provide experiences from the grassroots. Also, most organisations bring trainers from Canada or the US, but not trainers

from Jordan. This is not fruitful. I am from Jordan, I know how the governmental budget works; I know how donors such USAID work in Jordan because I have previous experience in the field. I can give my experience on this (Amman, 4 March 2011).

Ahlam is referring to the lack of connection with society discussed above, and she recommends having more trainers and experts from within the country. But will trainers from within the country reflect women's gender interests? I will address this question in the next chapter too, but it is worth considering here the case of the Vital Voices workshop, at which the women in the Jordanian delegation were all middle-to-upper class and had prestigious occupations. They were ideal reflections of the interests of their own specific contexts, but what about the interests of women like Dr Sabah or Jaleela, who come from remote areas? Challenging a very conservative tribe and finding ways of communicating with a remote community would also be extremely difficult for women who deal with international bodies and live in rich West Amman, and who therefore risk falling into and reproducing the same pitfalls imputed to international organisations.

Moreover, in line with Ahlam's suggestion, Hailineh, a Christian candidate from Amman who had participated in the activities of both local and international organisations, stated that she was very satisfied when she was able to listen to the experience of female MPs: 'They told me how to be a strong woman, how to use my charisma. They were the best... and I learned so much from them' (Amman, 12 January 2011). The JNFW organised meetings between former MPs and candidates. The programme manager at the UNDP also suggested that there is a need to make people more aware of women's success stories: 'Trainers [in women's organisations] have never been through candidacy: teaching only soft skills is not enough. It would be useful to learn from the experiences of women who won' (Amman, 8 March, 2011). More people who are involved in the field and have an in-depth experience of Jordanian society and its communities seem to be needed, since women are clearly crying out for them. They are asking for training, activities and networking opportunities, and they are eager to learn; but they also want to practise what they are learning and to implement these skills and tools effectively. However, we need to be careful when analysing the outcomes of these activities, and to look at the nuances in relation to participants and practitioners alike.

I argue that these political empowerment activities give women a great opportunity to raise their voices, to get to know each other and to open up spaces for dialogue. However, I believe that female candidates, just like their male counterparts, are not always consistent between what they think and what they report to organisations. I had a chance to participate in a focus group organised in Amman in January 2011 by the NDI, which reunited 12 female candidates after the election in order to discuss topics such as corruption and their expectations of women in parliament. There were 12 women around the table engaged in passionate discussion. I was extremely surprised when I heard the questions from the NDI programme manager: ‘What do you suggest for the future in terms of programmes we can organise? What did we miss?’ Only a few women raised their voices and made suggestions, and these suggestions were different from those I had heard during private interviews. For example, a candidate from Amman said: ‘There should be more interaction, more individual meetings between candidates and decision-makers.’ Another woman who proposed some recommendations gave some new ideas for training topics: ‘The trainings focused on candidates; they were about skills and techniques. But the organisations may want to ensure that women have free space in the media, in the newspapers, so that women will be able to deliver their message.’ Some of the women I had interviewed and who had criticised the organisation’s approach were at this workshop, but they did not comment. I was disappointed at first, but I also thought that this was another example of how women participants rely on these organisations as providers of benefits in terms of financial support, the enlargement of their networks or possible space in the media. Other than those two suggestions, the discussion revolved around the issue of quotas and the representation of political parties – extremely important issues, of course, but they were not related to the questions that were being asked, and they did not yield any other recommendations.

Organisations such the NDI and the IRI represent ‘neutral and international support’²⁸ for candidates, and I had the feeling that women were hesitant to offer any suggestions that might implicitly criticise the NDI’s work. The questions raised by the project manager were very relevant, and this was an indicator that they try to involve participants in the decision-making process, although the questions were more

²⁸ Interview with a candidate, Amman, 15 February 2011. My interviewee spoke about ‘neutral support’ in contrast to support from local women’s organisations, which in the majority of cases are connected to the regime.

directly focused on suggestions rather than needs. I could feel the difference between the interviews I had conducted and that roundtable discussion: through one-on-one discussion I was able to get both feedback and suggestions, thanks to my being an independent researcher unconnected with any organisation. The answers at the workshop were not so pertinent, and they demonstrated a kind of timidity on the women's part: if women were asking for change, that space would have been a great opportunity for them to speak out. This prompted me to question the interests behind women's participation in IOs' activities: there is the risk that such events will serve as an opportunity to show off, or to be a part of a certain international community, which would give prestige to women.

At that point I understood that I had to take advantage of my role as a researcher, and I met the project director of the NDI one more time. I wanted to raise some of the issues that had come up during my interviews with candidates, and I was hoping to make my contribution and suggestions. My respondent emphasised that it was difficult to receive feedback from participants, but she justified this in cultural terms: 'It is difficult to get feedback because they [female participants] are hesitant to tell us what they think; this is also due to the fact that they are very grateful, which is part of their culture. I think there is also too much victimisation: they tend to romanticise the problem, but without finding proper solutions' (Amman, 12 April 2011). I personally believe that it is more related to their fear of losing the support and opportunities they might obtain through a connection with the NDI.

During our meeting, we discussed the risk of imposing certain 'values', and of detachment from local 'cultures', which many women had described to me. My respondent at the NDI seemed to be fully aware of this issue, and she gave an example:

They [women] criticise the fact that we talk about and discuss fundraising, saying that this is not applicable to their community. But what we want to do is that we try to bring up those issues, we want them to think about and discuss those issues. Some women refuse to understand the concept, some others are more open, especially the youngest. Three young women at a workshop said: 'Fundraising might not be applicable here, but we want to learn more about it.' Some other women change their opinion, especially

when they see that they can find support through it. When you introduce a new concept there will always be someone who criticises it. But if at least one of the participants will think about it, I am happy and satisfied with that (Amman, 12 April 2011).

My respondent was raising a valid point, and I found some similarities between what she was saying and some of my interviews. Some of the women I interviewed who were very critical of IOs' political training seemed to dismiss certain ideas and concepts as 'foreign' and 'not authentic' rather too easily. Whatever was not part of their 'culture' and 'tradition' became the 'other', and they often rejected and sidelined this 'otherness' without investigating its potential or even its weaknesses. Although this 'cultural clash' – recalling Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' (1993) – is a problem many practitioners may face, and although the NDI appears to be listening to participants' needs, I also think that the NDI makes the choice to present certain 'Western' schemes without questioning their legitimacy. I therefore tried to suggest some of the things that women had recommended, such as the involvement of local experts or the presentation of success stories, but my respondent was not so keen on these recommendations:

In terms of local experts, we tried that, but they are not so credible. They do not respond in a good way. We have a woman, a local expert, but she just had an opinion on the issue and she was not credible. I have more credibility, because I am here for this reason. In terms of success stories, in theory this is an excellent idea, but again, when you come to practice, it is difficult. Female candidates before the elections don't have time, and when you give them the practical example, through the success story, each woman has a particular background and it will not be credible enough (Amman, 12 April 2011).

It is true that in the eyes of some people, locals may lack credibility. Many Jordanians, like most people in the region, will feel more respect for a foreigner than for a local. That is a true legacy of the colonial mindset. But it is also true that listening to success stories might be empowering and enriching for women who are

willing to become candidates. Moreover, I still think that greater attention to the local contexts, to the different stories and experiences of women, and to the diversity of needs in relation to location, education, class, religion and ethnicity would help to bring gender interests into empowerment projects.

Conclusions

Kawthar, Seham, Ahlam, Hind, Khawla, Fayza, Hailineh, Dr Sabah, Jaleela and Zachieh have very different backgrounds, stories, experiences and politics. Their participation in political training programmes may be problematic, since it is not clear whether it is driven by a desire to increase their skills, to find new ways of promoting social change, or whether it is mainly a matter of prestige and gaining international support. However, I argue that their and other women's experiences and accounts are useful, not only for understanding their expectations, but also for grasping the relationships and tensions between the interests of participants, trainers and organisations, whether local or international.

Needs are a response to a perceived necessity, in a specific context, without necessarily challenging women's subordinate position in society. In the case of some of the narratives described in this chapter, that perceived necessity might be learning how to communicate and behave in public and consequently gain more votes. However, in line with Sekhon's study (2006) of women's participation in India's *panchayats*, the very fact of being elected to parliament or to a lower political position is in itself a challenge to patriarchy. For this reason, although female candidates' interests might be perceived as merely practical, women were trying to find new strategies to win and be accepted as 'women' in politics in their society, community and families, thus challenging the status quo. Although I have used Molyneux's analysis (1985) to understand the differences between and the necessary combination of practical and strategic gender interests throughout this chapter, in line with some scholars (Beckwith, 2007a; Moser, 1993) and in light of female candidates' experiences, I consider that analysis to be too dichotomous and polarised. Interests vary depending on the particular cultural and socio-political context within which they are formulated. In the case of Dr Sabah, the candidate from Karak, the lack of support from her tribe and family negatively affected her campaign, thus requiring her to learn how to deal with these difficulties. Moreover, the fact that Fayza, the

candidate from Irbid, had not participated in previous elections was reflected in her interest in learning about the process of elections. But Fayza's interest was not shared by Seham, the candidate from Jerash, who had already run in 2003. Thus in the specific context of women's presence in politics, women's gender identities are just one among many alternative sources of loyalty and identification (tribal, ethnic, class, etc.), and Molyneux's classification of interests appears to be too reductionist.

The intersections between gender, class, tribal and kin allegiances, together with different places of residence and location, are some of the factors that might be included in an understanding of strategic gender needs. However, the vast majority of interventions for women worldwide are intended to meet women's practical gender needs, such as in the case of the NDI and IRI, and do not look at the intersections of the factors above. As long as the aim of these activities is to increase skills and tools without questioning women's position in society and the political arena, these interests cannot be considered strategic. As previously stated, I am aware of the great opportunity for dialogue and networking that forums such as the NDI and IRI can offer. However, I am still cautious about the larger benefits that they might provide. In line with Moser (1993), I argue that these interventions will help to challenge the unequal relationship between men and women and the consequent power relations within society only 'if and when, they are transformed into strategic gender needs' (41). In order to achieve strategic gender needs, top-down and bottom-up interventions need to be integrated, but the failure to do this continues to be a widespread reality.

As long as practical interests are at the core of these projects, and as long as women are considered to be 'lacking something', gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment projects may end in failure. One of the main challenges facing women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming policies is for them to become transformative projects, and not to be reduced to technocratic language and processes (Kelly, 2005: 473; Kandiyoti, 2007: 514). The key issues that are often ignored are to be found in the 'discriminatory systems of male resistance to women who dare to challenge male domination' of the political system (Longwe, 2000: 30).

The risk is that empowerment and gender mainstreaming might foster adaptation without transformation (Nusair, 2009: 151). As Kabeer (2004) outlines, this failure at the practical level has resulted in an emphasis on interventions that promise fast results, such as those promoted by the NDI and IRI, but which fall short of realising

their full transformative potential because empowerment is never really the intended goal. As long as empowerment and gender mainstreaming are not completely understood in terms of their full potential, and as long as such activities are ‘mechanistic quick fixes, that assume that problems of gender inequality can be addressed by redirecting some resources towards women’s [...] education, (and) skills development’ (Hawkesworth, 2006: 100), these programmes will lack transformative potential.

Finally, what the women I interviewed seemed to be observing during ‘democracy promotion’ activities is what has been defined as the ‘mix of ignorance and arrogance that the democratisers have demonstrated’ (Kodmani, 2010: 159). It is true that female candidates might too easily dismiss whatever is ‘foreign’ and ‘not authentic’, as described above. However, I agree with Kodmani (2010) that a major flaw in the ‘democracy promotion approach to the Middle East has been and remains the lack of trust in Arab societies’ in pursuing a ‘democratic culture’ (165). The instrumentalisation of women’s issues is not new, especially for democracy promotion purposes, as I have demonstrated with reference to Iraq and Palestine. Global gender regimes, neoliberal international organisations and foreign government agendas have influenced and are still affecting women’s empowerment and gender mainstreaming processes. Although Jordan is not undergoing a post-conflict reconstruction programme, the promotion and use of women’s political participation may merely constitute a form of ‘embedded feminism’ that operates to cloak other political and economic aims (Hunt and Rygiel, 2007). Since Jordan occupies a strategic position in the region, the US, followed by European countries, is trying to *use* women as the apparent recipients of its development programmes, pouring in large amounts of money, but without properly addressing the women’s cause. Similarly, although local organisations place greater attention on local needs and gender interests, I think it is important to challenge the origins of their funding and their collaboration with/co-option by the government/state/royal family. This questioning is vital, as is an understanding of who is deciding which gender interests form part of a movement’s political agenda. These are questions that I will further discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: INTERACTIONS BETWEEN WOMEN IN POLITICS AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

During a very busy week in the middle of February 2011, I conducted six interviews with women from very different backgrounds. First, I spoke with two women activists working at the JNFW and the JWU; later, I spoke with two extremely passionate female candidates, one living in Amman and the other in a beautiful house in the countryside in Madaba; and finally, I met a female MP at her office, and also the head of the gender focal point at the Ministry of Social and Political Development.

Not just during that week, but throughout the whole of my stay in Jordan, each interview I conducted was a different and unique experience. During that particular week, for instance, I moved from the formal atmosphere of parliament and ministry offices, through the friendly environments of the JNFW and JWU, to the pleasures of interesting discussion accompanied by delicious sweets, tea and even full meals at female candidates' homes, both in and outside Amman. Different types of locations certainly made me feel more or less comfortable with my interviewees, depending on the level of formality required, and the diversity of the people I met no less certainly influenced the discussions I engaged in. Most of the time I found myself asking my interviewees similar questions, especially when I was trying to understand the means used to promote women's rights and gender justice in Jordan. How did the intersections between different classes, types of education, jobs, levels of tribal support, religious beliefs, ethnic origins and places of residence manifest themselves in relation to campaigns against gender inequality? While the woman working at the ministry focused on the implementation of gender mainstreaming as her priority, the female candidate from Madaba was pushing for change in the election law in order to limit discrimination against women in the specific context of elections. While the female activist at the JWU prioritised gender-based violence issues, the MP was worried about striking a balance between promoting projects for women's economic empowerment and fulfilling her voters' requests for services. These diverse women seemed to me to be acting for and driven by the amelioration of women's rights in

Jordan. However, as I reflected on that week's meetings, I wondered how the intersections outlined above, coupled with the diverse roles each woman played, would impact on the representation and improvement of women's rights.

This reflection introduces the main debates I aim to address in this chapter: while continuing to develop the concept of the substantive representation of women, previously discussed in chapter three with reference to gender quotas, I aim here to understand who the proponents of this representation of women's rights in Jordan are and, most importantly, how they relate to each other. By introducing the different agendas of the female candidates and female MPs I interviewed, I aim to understand the extent to which women's rights and gender justice form part of the programmes and agendas of women in politics.¹ Furthermore, through the analysis of the relationships and tensions between female candidates, MPs, women's organisations and national machineries in Jordan, I will assess the extent to which women's rights are promoted in a systematic manner. What is the relationship between a bottom-up method of bringing women's rights to the fore – which female candidates might favour – and the role of women's organisations in voicing such demands? And what might this analysis tell us about the promotion of women's rights in Jordan and the related role of the state?

'Critical mass' or 'critical actors'?

Substantive representation, as analysed in chapter three with reference to the introduction of gender quotas, is the most important dimension of representation (Severs, 2010: 411), and consists in 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (Pitkin, 1967: 209). Research on 'critical mass' – which assumes that a higher number of women in parliament, coupled with changes in

¹ As explained in the introduction to the thesis, since women do not constitute a homogeneous category, I am going to pay attention to intersectionality throughout my analysis. Women are not characterised by a set of shared attributes; rather, their position in society is the result of 'social processes, generating relational differences, situations of clustering and affective bonding in which people feel affinity for other people' (Young, 1997: 254), with differences of class, ethnicity, background and education. In debates over representation, the problem of essentialism 'haunts every group that hopes to organise politically around a facet of identity' (Young, 2010: 204) and treats 'group interests as a priori undefined, context-related and subject to evolution' (Celis, 2006: 87–8). Since I am aware of the risk of essentialising women's gender interests, when I refer to 'women in Jordan' I will pay attention to the intersections between class, education, tribal support and place of residence, attempting to deconstruct the category 'women' in order to understand the interactions between the 'critical actors' in the substantive representation of women in Jordan.

parliamentary culture, will lead to female MPs being more successful in promoting women's gender interests² – has not supported the hypothesis that adding women will automatically make a difference to the promotion of women's rights (Childs and Krook, 2008). As I have demonstrated with reference to the introduction of affirmative measures such as quotas, it is not sufficient to 'add women and stir' in order to get women's rights recognised at the national level; a deeper analysis of the context, and of the hurdles for women who want to run for office, is needed. Moreover, the idea that 'being one of us' will automatically guarantee loyalty to 'our' interests (Mansbridge, 1999: 629) has been refuted by empirical research indicating that not all women in parliament seek to promote women's gender interests (Celis et al., 2008: 104). This is particularly true in a context such as Jordan, where the parliament functions not as a representational system but as a clientelist one, as outlined and discussed in chapter three. The value-added role of descriptive representatives is therefore increasingly seen as 'probabilistic rather than deterministic' (Dodson, 2001: 11), and the concept of 'critical actors' has been put forward to emphasise the importance of multiple actors within and outside parliament (Childs and Krook, 2008; Childs and Withey, 2006).

On one hand, debates about representation distinguish between authorisation and accountability: what makes a representative is the fact that she or he is authorised to act by a set of official institutions that also bind together the represented group. The legitimate representative must be accountable to those whom she or he represents (Young, 2010: 194). Thus representation, in line with Pitkin's work (1967), moves between moments of authorisation and moments of accountability. Disconnection between constituents and representatives is always a possibility, and the connection can be maintained over time through anticipation and recollection in moments of authorisation and accountability (Young, 2010: 194). Moreover, according to Young (2010) and Weldon (2002), authorisation and accountability will occur through official institutions and in the public life of independent civic associations – which includes women's organisations.

² As discussed in greater detail in chapter one, when I use the term 'interests' I am referring to gender interests. Please see chapter one for a theoretical discussion. In chapter four I analyse the interests of women who have participated in leadership training programmes organised by selected international and local organisations. My attention in that chapter was more focused on why women choose to participate in activities promoted both by international and local organisations. In this chapter I refer to gender interests in a broader way, referring to the promotion of women's rights in Jordan.

On the other hand, debates about the representation of women's gender interests have often concentrated on questions such as 'do women represent women?', as pointed out by Celis et al. (2008). Some contributions to the debate on descriptive and substantive representation have tried to bridge the gap between debates on women's legislative behaviour and those on women's policy agencies (Celis et al., 2008; Weldon, 2002). Weldon (2002), for instance, recognises that individual legislators may constitute one means of representation, but suggests that other sites, such as women's movements and women's policy agencies, offer alternative means. Weldon (2002) justifies this argument on the grounds that women's gender interests are best defined through collective processes of the articulation of such interests, rather than simply from the perspective of a single legislator. In their theoretical analysis of new approaches to the study of substantive representation, Celis et al. (2008), in line with Weldon (2002), believe that it is crucial to broaden the scope of enquiry to acknowledge multiple actors who are engaged in representational activities in a variety of different sites, abandoning questions like 'do women represent women?' or 'do women in politics make a difference?' in favour of questions such as 'who claims to act for women?' and 'where, why, and how does substantive representation of women occur?' (Celis, et al., 2008: 104).

If the goal is to capture the richness of 'what is going on in representation' (Saward, 2006), this approach leaves open the question of who might act on behalf of women's rights, where substantive representation might take place, and what the substantive representation of women might entail. It thus does not presume that the substantive representation of women requires a 'critical mass' of women; rather, it explores the many ways in which 'critical actors' in various locations may seek to promote what they regard as women's concerns (Celis et al., 2008: 100). In addition, as Squires (2008: 190) suggests, in analyses of representation attention might also be paid to how the representative's claim-making might constitute gender relations in a specific context, thus taking into consideration not only women's gender interests from a bottom-up perspective, but also top-down representative processes, such as in the case of gender mainstreaming policies. There is no doubt that the types of politics involved in conditionalities of gender mainstreaming and the system of electoral politics come from very different universes. However, in light of the new framework presented by Celis et al. (2008) and the suggestion proposed by Squires (2008), I aim to address the debate on the substantive representation of women in Jordan by not

only focusing on the role of parliamentarians, but also analysing the relationships and tensions between candidates, MPs, women's organisations and national machineries.

Female candidates' and MPs' campaigns

During the run-up to the parliamentary elections in early November 2010,³ trying to get used to the confused and heavy traffic of Amman, I was driving around the city looking for female candidates' banners and posters. As I had expected, the majority of banners represented male candidates, and all of those I saw bearing a female picture were for the same three or four women. When I interviewed some female candidates, both from Amman and from outside, it emerged that a lack of financial resources was one of the reasons for this paucity of banners. Amneh Zu'bi, the president of the JWU, confirmed this during an interview with journalist Rana Hussein, stating that 'the majority of women candidates lack funding or are incapable of supporting their campaigns financially on the same level as male candidates' (Hussein, 2012). Moreover, some of the banners depicting female candidates had been taken down or even burned, as I described in chapter three.

Although I saw only a few banners for female candidates, I was very curious about their content and message. At first glance the banners in the streets, for male and female candidates alike, were devoid of any convincing or specific statements about how to challenge the country's social, political and economic problems. For instance, one independent candidate from West Amman used the very generic slogan 'Homeland's daughter... everyone's sister' (*ibnat al-watan... ukht al-jami*). Reem Badran, another candidate from West Amman and the only woman to be elected outside of the quota system, chose an original way to promote herself with the statement 'Without slogans' (*badun shi'arat*).⁴ Emily Naffa, a women's rights activist and former candidate interviewed by Rana Hussein, confirmed my perceptions and criticised these banners for the weakness of their messages: 'The slogans are below our expectations and do not address the political challenges that Jordan is facing in the region,' she said (Hussein, 2012). Moreover, none of the female candidates' banners I saw made any particular statement about women's rights or gender issues; they were just generic messages calling for justice, democracy and freedom. Although

³ The elections were held on 9 November 2010.

⁴ For more banners and statements, see Abu-Rish and Ghannam 2010.

it is not the aim of this research to conduct an analysis of statements, banners or representations in this sense, this lack seemed to me to provide a starting point for exploring whether and to what extent female candidates addressed women's rights in their programmes. An understanding of the gendered nature of representative politics will 'show how the constraints of real political situations affect the capacities of actually existing women politicians' (Lovenduski, 2005: 9) – and of candidates too. This analysis will enable me to better understand the relationships between candidates, MPs, women's organisations and national machineries.

One of the most challenging questions I had to ask during my fieldwork was to understand whether a given candidate was running a campaign that addressed women's rights. The difficult part did not relate to the content of the question in and of itself, but rather arose when I had to engage in discussions of women's rights. My realisation of the candidates' limited knowledge of women's rights at the national level left me struggling during the interviews. The majority⁵ of the female candidates I interviewed were very general in their explanations, and did not want to get into in-depth discussions of the subject. To be sure, the content of a candidate's agenda may be shaped by several phenomena, as I will discuss throughout this chapter: a candidate's decision not to deal with women's rights might be an implicit acknowledgement that demanding rights for women will not 'fly' and might alienate parts of both the male and female electorate. There could also be a lack of acknowledgement that there is such a thing as 'women's rights' in the first place. However, as I will further discuss, educational levels, professional positions, places of residence, religion, and ethnic and tribal relations also constituted some of factors in the diverse female candidates' campaigns.

When I met Jaleela, a middle-aged Muslim woman and activist from Jerash, her close relationship and connection with her community came up immediately. I met her in Amman, in the office of the GFJW; she is the head of the GFJW's Jerash branch, and I had made contact with her through the organisation. Jaleela was extremely frank, kind and willing to share her experiences of candidacy with me. Her self-confidence resulted from her being a 'good' wife and 'good' mother, and from her involvement in community work, as she put it: 'A woman is first of all successful in her house, and then in her community' (Amman, 16 December 2010). Jaleela has

⁵ Out of the 26 candidates I interviewed, I was able to have in-depth discussions about the status of women's rights in Jordan with only seven.

been working in her community for 20 years, and she stood in the parliamentary elections of both 2003 and 2010. When she told me that she would have promoted university-level study in her community if she had been elected, her attachment to her town became clear: 'There is no university here [in Jerash], and with the creation of a loan/scholarship office in Jerash, students and women as well will know about the opportunities they have to study' (Amman, 16 December 2010). Her focus is certainly on how to improve education among the new generation. However, instead of thinking about national policies that will encourage the spread of education, she limits her area of action to the governorate from which she comes – something that falls within the remit of a municipal councillor, rather than of an MP. But in a country that institutionalises the representation of sectoral interests, be they tribal, familial or regional, why would a candidate think beyond her (or his) own electoral base?

Jaleela's story was echoed by the case of an elected female MP from Tafilah whom I interviewed in her office in parliament. As we sat surrounded by three men, who were chatting and apparently paying us little attention, her words revealed her attachment to the community:

In my campaign, I focused on the development of women in the community, especially on issues concerning violence against women, as I am doing in my organisation, Fatima Al-Sahra, in Tafilah. But also, I advocated the establishment of a children's garden in Tafilah (Amman, 2 March 2011).

This female MP's platform arises from her strong and ongoing relationship with her community, and this relationship reflects the structure of Jordanian society, which is founded on tribes and tribal support, as described in chapters two and three. As Lust and Hourani (2011: 120) showed in their analysis of the 2010 elections in Jordan, people often expect that those who belong to the same family, tribe, neighbourhood or personal network will give each other privileged support; this is particularly true of MPs. Such expectations from the family, community and larger social network shape the parliamentarian's role as service provider.

On the one hand, voters will choose the candidate that promises the most favours and services, as Reem, a well-known activist on violence against women, told me during an interesting conversation in her office in Amman:

If I were a person with low income and from a poor area... I would choose a candidate who can give me services. For instance, if I need my son or my daughter to go to university, I will pick the candidate who will help me with that. Why? Because parliamentarians are perceived as service-oriented... service providers. I am not saying this is right. But I am saying this is the reality (Amman, 28 April 2011).

On the other hand, parliamentarians will offer and promise services in order to get more votes. The fact that candidates campaign mainly for their community's interests, instead of for national reforms, reveals the extent to which their agendas are shaped by tribal and social ties in a system where patronage rules parliament; this is the case for both female and male candidates.

Candidates' blood relationships to their tribes or families also emerged in the discourse about 'why women do not vote for women'. Although more than one candidate told me that this was because of the alleged jealousy factor among women, tribalism and blood relationships were the most cited reasons: voters expect favours and services from the candidate they support, whether a man or a woman. Once elected, MPs have to juggle between the promotion of their own agenda and the services that they are expected to provide. One day at the end of May 2011, I was at parliament waiting to talk to MP Reem Badran. I had an appointment and was waiting for her in her office with her assistant. While I was waiting, three different people came into the office in the space of 10 minutes, all asking to see her. During my interview with Reem Badran I realised that all of those people had come to ask for personal favours, and she expressed her frustration to me as she talked about the expectations placed upon her candidacy:

To make change is not easy at all. I knew it was not going to be easy. But receiving personal kinds of requests, it is really too much for me; they ask me to help their brother, their daughter, their wife. Every day I receive this kind of request. And the people who are outside the office right now [those I had seen entering her office], they expect this. I understand that families have challenges and

unemployment is really high, but I want to focus on major issues. Although I place importance on families, I place it also on the public sphere. It is important to balance individual and group needs. Being an MP is much more challenging than I had expected. People contact me a lot, by phone, email, fax, coming here, a lot... A lot. I used to say that my priority was to serve groups, not to serve individuals. How to find the balance it is not an easy task, because you can easily get too involved in the details and forget about the broader picture (Amman, 26 May 2011).

The fact that attempts to receive entitlement through patronage tend to supersede the rights of the community has been considered by scholars to be characteristic of politics in most countries in the Middle East, and this makes it more difficult to pursue democratic reform, 'because these reforms basically focus on protecting individual rights' (Ben-Meir, 2006: 207). Adding to the problem are traditional loyalties to the family and the tribe, which naturally erode the principles of democratic government such as advice, consent and majority rule. These factors are not limited to the Jordanian case, but are extendable to other countries in the region where tribal and familial ties are strong.

Striking the balance between offering personal services and promoting a programme is not an easy task, either for MPs or for candidates. The pressure of tribal or family relationships often influences and shapes a candidate's campaign, leaving the campaign's potential gender dimension unexplored. However, close relationships with one's tribe or family are not the only factors that contribute to the shaping of a candidate's agenda.

The limited presence of the promotion of women's rights on a candidate's agenda was often related to the reasons behind her candidacy. Those who were not willing to champion gender justice revealed to me that they wanted to gain prestige in their community, as one very honest candidate from Jerash put it: 'I have been involved in a lot of volunteering activities during recent years, but I have always been behind the scenes. I wanted to become a well-known member of my community' (Jerash, 12 February 2011). This woman is representative of the male and female candidates who consider the elections an opportunity to gain better recognition within their

community, irrespective of the qualifications and experience needed to become an MP.⁶

Although the desire for prestige and public recognition may influence some candidates' campaigns, some of the women I interviewed were extremely passionate about the opportunity to make changes in the political sphere. This was particularly the case with women who had been involved in community work and had been activists for several years, as Terez, a middle-aged candidate from Madaba and a long-standing member of the JWU, forcefully told me:

I have been an activist since 1977 and I have been demanding the development of women's rights throughout all those years. I feel that women need to be represented by good women. I know and believe that the situation of women will not change if there is no development in the political field. And this is why there is a need to change some discriminatory laws against women (Amman, 17 April 2011).

Terez is mainly referring to the family law,⁷ which does not guarantee equal rights in the provision of pensions and social security benefits, and the nationality and citizenship laws,⁸ which bar women from passing Jordanian citizenship to their spouses or children, as described in chapter two. Interestingly, yet not surprisingly, the amendment to the Nationality Law was a topic particularly raised by women of Palestinian origin.⁹ Moreover, some of the women who addressed the topic of the Nationality Law did so by presenting it not in terms of women's rights, as it tends to be presented by women's rights activists, but in terms of a child's right to obtain nationality. This is a by-product of Jordan's bizarre citizenship regime, which turns Palestinians into refugees and stateless people; the issue of children's nationality is therefore not just about women's rights.¹⁰

⁶ The issue of candidates' qualification is also discussed in chapter three with reference to quotas.

⁷ First promulgated as Temporary Law No. 61 of 1976.

⁸ Nationality Law No. 6 of 1954 (last amended 1987).

⁹ Only a minority of the women I interviewed (seven out of 26) declared themselves to be of Palestinian origin.

¹⁰ The legal status of Palestinians in Jordan is complicated, particularly with reference to citizenship's rights. Although it is not the aim of the thesis to analyse this problematic categorisation, Palestinians receive different legal treatments in regard to citizenship's rights whether they have had any connection with Gaza or the West Bank, whether they have been living in the West Bank or in Jordan, whether

Foz, a middle-aged widow and mother of eight, mentioned the Nationality Law as the first reform she would have promoted if elected. Foz welcomed me into her home in Amman, specifying that this was ‘her second home’, since her first is still in Palestine. I went to meet her with Ahlam, another candidate from Amman, also of Palestinian origin. Foz’s participation in political life has been influenced by her husband’s previous experience, since he was an MP in 1989. Foz was very proud of him, showing me all her pictures of him with prominent political leaders, including one with Yasser Arafat. Her national origin was a constant part of the interview, together with her feeling that she is not considered a full citizen, as she bluntly told me: ‘Palestinians living here [in Jordan] with a national number can vote, but most of them did not go and vote, because this is not their country, and because they believe that all the decisions and positions have already been taken by the government’ (Amman, 24 May 2011). Although Foz appeared a little frustrated with – and yet sympathetic to – the Palestinians she was referring to, and although she had no faith in the position of the state, Foz was very interested in contributing to Jordan’s political life, and this had been reflected in her campaign. Although the nationality issue was her priority, she was also very dedicated to the challenge to gender inequalities, as she continued: ‘Women are not considered to be as strong and powerful as men in our society. You struggle too much as a woman, at the economic, political or social level’ (Amman, 24 May 2011). Ahlam, who had insisted on coming with me since she had introduced me to Foz, very much supported what Foz was saying. However, when Ahlam learned that Foz was a member of the National Party¹¹ and had not run independently, at one point she challenged her: ‘I do not see any reason for you to be part of this party. They will act in their interests, not yours. Your party pay their MPs to promote their agenda.’ Foz did not agree with her, but their discussion focused on how to build trust between candidates and voters, given that, according to Ahlam, being part of a party might undermine this relationship.

The majority of the female candidates I interviewed (19 out of 26) had run as independents. The presence of political parties in Jordan’s political life is extensively discussed in chapter two; however, the decision to adhere to a party (or not) can also

they have been refugees from the occupied Gaza Strip or whether they have been Jerusalem residents. For an extensive explanation see Jamjoum, 2013.

¹¹ It was founded in 2007 and asks for the creation of a democratic environment within the country, (<http://www.jordanpolitics.org/en/index.php/parties/current-parties/745-the-jordanian-national-party-> [accessed 27 May 2013]).

be related to Ahlam's comment on the risk of co-option of the candidate's agenda, as other female candidates I interviewed also confirmed. Moreover, as recently happened in Egypt (in 2013), political parties may disfavour their female candidates, who have lower chances of election, by placing them at the bottom of their lists (ECWR, 2012). The preference for standing as an independent is also a result of the lack of representation of political parties in parliament – something that slightly changed in the 2013 elections.¹² Candidates might therefore prefer to rely on the support of their tribes, families and voters.

Among those women who had run as members of a party, the majority were related to the al-Wasat Islamic Party.¹³ Towards the end of my fieldwork, in June 2011, I went to do one last interview with a female candidate from Amman. She was Dr Mahara, a member of al-Wasat Islamic Party, and she welcomed my translator and me into her home. Religion had influenced her campaign, along with her adherence to the party. It was not easy for her to get through the elections, as she told me: 'I did not have the support of my family, because I was a member of a party. In their mind I would support the party more than the family. And it was not a matter of services, they did not believe in my party's ideology' (Amman, 2 June 2011). Dr Mahara did not link her family's lack of support to the provision of services – which was constantly pointed out during interviews with other female candidates as an elected MP's expected duty – but focused more on her campaign. The al-Wasat Party supports a moderate interpretation of Islam, and criticises extreme religious ideologies that do not support pluralism or that promote violence.¹⁴ While explaining her campaign to me, Dr Mahara stressed the importance of implementing already existing laws in cases where the source of the law is Islam (*shari'a*), particularly with reference to marriage, women's education and women's labour participation.

Another member of the same party, a candidate from Jerash, had focused her campaign on combating violence against women, especially within the family, where, in her words, 'the husband still controls and decides what a woman can do or not do... and this is not what Islam teaches us' (Jerash, 12 February 2011). Islam and the

¹² As described in chapter three, the temporary election law for the 2010 elections was changed for the 2013 elections, allowing voters to cast two ballots: one for a candidate in their constituency, and one from party lists, elected by proportional representation at the national level.

¹³ It was founded in 2001, and it emphasises its role as a political, national and democratic party with Islamic reference; not as a religious party, (<http://www.wasatparty.org/> [accessed 10 March 2013]).

¹⁴ Although it is not the aim of this research to analyse the Islamic Movement in Jordan, it should be stated here that the party is independent of the Muslim Brotherhood.

implementation of *shari'a* law came up exclusively with women who were members of this particular party. Although I interviewed many Muslim candidates (21 out of the 26 interviewees), when they were discussing their campaigns, religion was rarely mentioned. Tribal relations, ethnic origins, class, professional background and previous involvement in community work appeared to me to have influenced the campaigns more than religion, reflecting Jordan's social and cultural structure.

Modifying and amending laws to reduce discrimination against women was a priority for the women I interviewed, especially for those who were lawyers or active members of women's organisations. In the case of Seham, a lawyer I met in her office in the busy centre of Jerash, the connection between her daily work and her campaign was clear:

Thanks to my job as a lawyer I constantly deal with family rights, civil law and legitimacy law. I already work for women and I represent them in my work. Women's rights are closely related to my job. I know what their problems are. Even women who are considered to be 'free' or more liberal, they face problems within society. As an MP I would have focused on the revision of some laws. I believe that laws influence society in a greater way than awareness campaigns (Jerash, 5 February 2011).

Like Terez, Seham was very influenced by her work and her active participation in the community. A focus on the amendment and modification of laws that discriminate against women appeared in the interviews I conducted not only with reference to family laws and the personal status code, but also to violence against women. Eman, a candidate from Balqa, was very concerned about this, as she told me in the library where she works: 'In my campaign I focused on family issues and particularly on violence against women. Violence inside the family is a big problem' (Balqa, 12 January 2011). Eman is mostly referring to laws that grant leniency for murders committed in the name of family honour and impose reduced penalties for such murders.¹⁵ Although the focus on laws was greater than I had expected, particularly among middle- and upper-class women, some female candidates who lived in remote

¹⁵ Articles 98 and 340 of the Jordanian Penal Code.

and poor areas outside Amman and came from lower social classes focused their campaigns on economic empowerment as a way to emancipate women, trying to find ways to offer women more work opportunities and to increase women's representation in the workplace.

As became clear to me during the interviews, the majority of the female candidates I talked to had had a relatively explicit focus on gender inequality and disadvantage in their campaigns. However, a minority of the women I interviewed had preferred to use a different strategy. Some highly educated candidates involved in the field of business had chosen not to address women's rights in their campaigns for strategic reasons, as Hind, from Amman, neatly told me:

I do not have an agenda focused on women's rights. This issue is very sensitive. And men prefer not to have women talking about women's rights. That is why I focused my campaign on the entire community and not exclusively on women. But if elected, I would have addressed women's rights, especially with reference to education. At the moment, our educational system weakens the role of women in our society. For instance, in books, the mother of the family is always described as a housewife, and the father as the paterfamilias. The daughter stays at home with her mother to clean the house, and it is the boy who goes out with the father to do the grocery shopping. So, if elected, I would have focused on the curricula, for instance (Amman, 1 February 2011).

The patriarchal nature of society, and the ways in which women are perceived by their male counterparts, are reflected in Hind's decision not to explicitly address women's rights in order to gain the legitimacy to serve as a representative, since being a woman in politics can be still considered taboo.

The intersections between different professional backgrounds, levels of education, tribal relations, ethnic origins, (Islamic) party membership, involvement with women's groups and places of residence led to diverse campaigns and strategies among the women I interviewed. A previous involvement with women's groups does not automatically lead a candidate to focus her campaign on the promotion of gender justice at the national level. Indeed, in the cases of Jaleela and the MP from Tafilah,

their close relationships with their tribes and communities influenced their campaigns, leaving the gender dimension partially unexplored. However, if a candidate has been involved in women's rights groups, her campaign is more likely to address gender justice: 15 out of the 26 candidates I interviewed were members of or connected to the main national women's organisations, the JNCW, the GFJW, the JNFW and the JWU, and with seven of these I was able to have in-depth discussions about the promotion of women's rights. If a candidate has had experience of or involvement with women's groups in Jordan, this helps her to be more confident, and more aware of women's rights and discrimination against women. This is not just the case for Jordan, but has also been argued with reference to other countries. In her recent research on narratives about women MPs in the Indian parliament, Rai (2012) shows that 'social movements are the field of politics within which aspirant individuals develop their political networks and skills,' providing the stage on which 'political performance is crafted' (202–203) – and I would add, increasing awareness of women's rights among MPs, reflecting the diversity of strategies and visions. Moreover, adherence to a specific religion (Islam in this case), does not automatically lead to its promotion when it comes to women's rights: Islam was addressed by women members of the al-Wasat Islamic party only. Lastly, being of Palestinian origin focused candidates' attention on the modification of the Nationality Law more than on other laws that discriminate against women (such as the personal status code, or the penal code in relation to violence against women).

Female candidates and MPs are not the only actors who are likely to represent women's rights, especially according to the framework developed by Celis et al. (2008). What then is the relationship between the ways in which candidates bring women's rights into public debate and the role of women's organisations in campaigning on these issues? It is crucial for my analysis of the substantive representation of women to consider the diverse approaches, strategies and tensions between women's organisations.

Diversity in women's organising: state control and donor influence

In chapter two, I introduced the historical background and development of women's organising in Jordan, and particularly highlighted the differences between independent organisations such as the JWU and their royal and semi-governmental

counterparts, as well as their activities and my own experience while visiting them. In chapter four I analysed how organisations such as the JWU, JNCW and JNFW understood, operationalised and translated political empowerment and gender mainstreaming policies into practice with reference to the activities organised for candidates in the 2010 parliamentary elections. In this chapter I will analyse the diversity among women's organisations on the basis of external factors that contribute to the fragmentation of the women's 'movement'. This analysis will help me to discuss which women's rights are advocated by women's organisations, and the extent to which female candidates and MPs relate to women's organisations in challenging gender inequalities.

As emerges from the activities of these organisations described in chapter two and four, the issues of concern to women activists are very similar, focusing on – but not limited to – economic and political empowerment, social security, and violence against women. As Reem, an activist working on violence against women, revealed to me during our discussion of the varieties of women activists: 'We share common issues, such as the issue of nationality, the issue of changing the Personal Status Law, and the issue of violence. But each of us has different opinions and approaches' (Amman, 28 April 2011). The activities of state-sponsored organisations are more focused on analysis and research directed towards the implementation or modification of laws through institutional channels; for grassroots organisations such as the JWU, and to a certain extent also the JNFW, services to women at the grassroots are more evident, and lobbying activities take place through civil society networks and street demonstrations. The JNCW is both a women's coalition and a service-oriented organisation, in line with DAWN's classification (Sen and Grown, 1987: 89–96); but given its explicit role in monitoring compliance with international conventions such as the CEDAW, it might be perceived partly as a think tank. The JNFW and the JWU might be considered service-oriented and grassroots organisations. Moreover, while for the JNCW lobbying takes place through institutional channels and by writing official reports, the JWU adopts different strategies, both by organising debates among various actors within civil society, and by demonstrating and protesting in the street.

Although the different historical backgrounds and strategies of each organisation should ideally reflect the diversity of women in Jordan, this is not always the case. As Joseph (1997: 57) argues in relation to the status of women's organisations in

Lebanon, women's groups can reinforce inequalities based on class, religion, ethnicity or gender; thus they need to be scrutinised for their reproduction of social systems of discrimination. However, organisations (or think tanks) established through a top-down approach, as is the case with the JNCW, do not seem to have been meant to be inclusive in the first place: they often over-represent 'professionals', such as lawyers, because they consider their role to be technical. This point recalls my criticism in chapter four of the ways in which gender mainstreaming rhetoric may treat compliance as a technical issue, rather than as a political issue with transformative potential.

Furthermore, these systems of discrimination can be reproduced not only through the personnel of institutions, but also through the politics of the institution itself, which may reflect the politics the country. Indeed, although the state cannot completely control an organisation from the inside, by establishing and co-opting agendas and strategies, it may enhance it through the force of law. According to some activists with the AWO, the various laws¹⁶ that frame and regulate women's organisations and actions in Jordan tend to limit women's actions in relation to social services; this situation deteriorated particularly after 11 September 2001. Since then, the political and economic relationship between Jordan and the United States became closer and stronger,¹⁷ and at the same time the state's control over civil society activities increased through the force of law. According to Leila Hamarneh, the project director of AWO:

Civil society organisations have been strong and well established in Jordan. They had the power to affect government policies, but since 2001, and because of the 'war on terror', the freedom of NGOs has been restricted. NGOs are no longer working for people; they are competing with the government. Especially since the 2008 law that limited NGOs' freedom of action, this government has been suppressing NGOs: it wants to control them (Amman, 11 January 2011).

¹⁶ Women's organisations are regulated by the 2008 Law of Societies No. 51 and its amendments.

¹⁷ After 11 September 2001, Jordan became the sixth largest recipient of US aid. See chapter two for an analysis of the relationship between Jordan and the US.

The 2008 Law of Societies (amended in 2009)¹⁸ restricts associations' freedom of action by prohibiting any pursuit of 'political objectives' and activities that violate 'public order' (HRW, 2009). Independent organisations such as the JWU and AWO have to balance state control with their political agendas; government-related organisations already know that they have limited space for action. The different ideologies behind the agendas of each group, and the different levels of control imposed by the state, lead to discrepancies between women's organisations, thus potentially undermining the promotion of gender justice in Jordan. However, different relationships with the state are not the only reason for this diversity.

Activists in Jordan feel that women's organisations were more unified before donors started to influence civil society (interview at the JWU, 11 April 2011). According to Randa, the gender consultant, the lack of cooperation between women's organisations can be attributed also, but not exclusively, to donors' policies:

Donors play a negative role here [referring to divisions among women's organisations]. They split the pie: on the one hand, the EU and the UN support leftist organisations. On the other hand, USAID supports royal and governmental organisations. But they do not make enough efforts to work together (Amman, 8 March 2011).

The role and impact of donors on civil society is certainly not peculiar to Jordan, and it raises questions for many post-colonial societies. The impact of foreign funding on civil society and the practices of women's movements have been a concern of scholars and activists in the region, as in the cases of Palestine (Jad, 2004; Richter-Devroe, 2009), Egypt (Al-Ali, 2000; Al-Ali, 2003) and Iraq (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009b; Mojab, 2007), and have produced new debates about the independence and political role of NGOs. In the case of Palestine, for instance, Richter-Devroe (2009) and others (Hammami, 1995; Jad, 2004) have shown that the NGO-isation of civil society in the wake of the Oslo Accords led to the fragmentation of the grassroots social movement into smaller NGOs, which often compete for the same funds (Richter-Devroe, 2009: 169).

¹⁸ Law Amending the Law on Societies, No. 22 of 2009.

In Jordan, similarly to Egypt, where some of the debates among activists revolved around ‘good’ and ‘bad’ donors (Al-Ali, 2000: 202), I found myself involved in discussions with activists concerning which donors and countries to accept money from. Besides receiving support from national institutions such as ministries, government-related organisations such as the JNCW collaborate with UN agencies and USAID. On the other hand, independent organisations such as the JWU and AWO reject any type of support from US-related donors, including the NDI, the IRI and USAID itself, which is considered to be representative of ‘western hegemonies’, as Nadia Shamrouk, the director of the JWU, stressed: ‘The United States are the cause of many political crises all over the third world. And through their donors they provide money for development and projects. But we, as the JWU, do not trust their support at all’ (Amman, 17 January 2011). Nadia Shamrouk is mainly referring to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, but also to the more recent invasion of Iraq. Political and historical events have also influenced her attitude to UN agencies’ support, as she explained to me about the JWU’s recent collaboration with UNIFEM (now called UN-WOMEN):

For a long time we were not in contact with UNIFEM. Two years ago UNIFEM started to contact us, and now we are collaborating on an anti-trafficking project with them. The UN system, if considered only for its humanitarian work and activities, is good. But if you consider its political influence over international relations, it is weak. In the case of Iraq and Palestine, for instance, the UN did nothing, and most importantly they did not try to influence the political situation in a positive way (Amman, 17 January 2011).

In response to my question whether this cooperation with UNIFEM did not contradict her views on foreign funding, Nadia Shamrouk justified it as a matter of cooperation and changes in leadership: ‘During recent years, the UN agencies have become more cooperative: sometimes it is also a matter of the person in charge of the regional office. This made the difference.’ The relationships between activists and the types of person at the top of organisations constitute an influencing factor in the building of vertical collaborations not only between donors and organisations, but also between organisations and their members, as I will address in the following

sections. However, the JWU, like many other independent women's organisations, mainly relies on 'better-accepted' donors, such as the EU or European (Swedish, Greek, Spanish and Italian) NGOs, which are considered less 'hegemonic'.

Surprisingly to me, the debate on foreign funding did not question whether it is appropriate to accept foreign financial support; it was assumed that funding support is necessary for the sustainability of organisations, and the search for funding is a well-developed organisational practice. However, the reliance on foreign funding raises questions about the credibility of the agendas promoted by the organisations, especially the independent ones. Lucine, an anthropologist I met, was concerned about the spread of foreign funding and its potential to undermine an independent agenda:

I feel that there is no independent feminist¹⁹ agenda in Jordan.

There are many organisations that call for women's rights, but all these get funds from outside Jordan. And I do not know whether they were active before they got the funds, or if they became active only after getting the funds. It is just that they are very dependent on external funds (Amman, 6 June 2011).

While Lucine may be right in relation to some of the smaller independent organisations, the history of the main women's organisations demonstrates that their agendas have been shaped by political and social factors. In the case of the JWU, for instance, Nadia Shamrouk convincingly explained that she relies on selected donors, but without compromising the JWU's agenda: 'I write the proposal considering what I want to do and to work on; I do not follow donors' guidelines' (Amman, 17 January 2011). The significance of Nadia Shamrouk's words needs to be considered in light of the fact that the JWU is a highly recognised organisation, both nationally and internationally. If the JWU has a close relationship with certain donors, the same cannot be said for new and younger organisations. In the latter cases, the having to follow strict donor guidelines might undermine the independence of certain groups.

If foreign funding has helped to widen the already existing gaps among women's organisations, the 'lack of courage' arising from different approaches and

¹⁹ By 'feminist', Lucine means an agenda that promotes gender equality and justice.

relationships to the state is still a matter of concern, in relation not only to horizontal collaborations between organisations, but also to relationships between organisations and women at the grassroots, as I will discuss in the following sections. The creation of networks and attempts at collaboration are happening, but the links are very weak, as an activist I interviewed at the JWU told me:

We try to collaborate with other organisations, but you get to a certain point and you do not go forward. Take the family law as an example: we made a coalition, but when the government and the Islamic movement criticised us, a lot of the organisations withdrew (Amman, 11 April 2011).

The activist is referring to the moderation that royal and governmental organisations demonstrate in their campaigns for reforms of the personal status code, the Nationality Law, or laws that regulate so-called honour crimes. Given the political, cultural and social sensitivity of these reforms, economic or political empowerment in the form of women's increased participation in politics and the workforce is a 'safer' and less compromising ground of action. This lack of radical change concerning women's rights and gender justice has characterised the 'movement' in the past no less than in the present. Scholars such as Brand (1998) and Warrick (2009: 143) describe the 'movement' as overly bourgeois, but consider the moderate approach a necessary condition for its success (Warrick, 2009: 143–144) – with an attendant risk that it will reproduce power relations and social hierarchies, I might add. I also believe that the lack of political will to build better cooperation among women's groups, whether independent or state-driven, is at the root of this lack of collaboration, as Randa, the gender consultant, also pointed out:

Local organisations say that they need to cooperate, but when they come together, nothing happens. There is no institution that is credible, including the JNCW. There are the Ministry of Social and Political Development and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, with a gender focal point at the ministerial level – but what do these institutions mean to women's organisations? The demands of these institutions are not clear to

them or to the organisations. Something drastic needs to be done in order to make them work together (Amman, 8 March 2011).

Randa stresses the importance of stronger cooperation, but she also underlines that the actors involved in the representation of women's rights are not limited to women's organisations; they involve other women's policy agencies at the national level, recalling Celis et al.'s (2008) argument about the multiplicity of actors in the substantive representation of women. As long as there are obstacles in the way of communication between different actors, change seems difficult to achieve.

National gender machineries: lack of political will

As I clarified at the beginning of the chapter, and as I have tried to address in my analysis of state-related organisations, in order to supplement the debates on the substantive representation of women, an exploration of the constitutive representation of gender is necessary. Drawing on the literature on gender mainstreaming (Verloo, 2001; Rai, 2003; True, 2003; Squires, 2005), and on the assumption that all policies constitute gender relations in particular ways, some of them more conducive of equality than others (Squires, 2008: 190), representation may be understood as a constitutive practice. Highlighting the extent to which the effects of such practices will be determined by particular networks of power (Squires, 2008: 192), the analysis of representative practices needs to be extended beyond national legislatures; the use of national gender machineries can be considered as a strategy for distributing women's gender interests across state and local institutions.

Most of the critiques of the institutionalisation of gender at the national level are related to the lack of awareness in gender planning and the lack of resources (Moser, 1993: 118; Larson, 2008; Staudt, 1998). While I was in Jordan I had the opportunity to meet Majd and Khulud, two women working in the gender units²⁰ of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and the Ministry of Social and Political Development (MoSPD). Majd seemed to be very pessimistic, resigned to the fact that only 'a few people care about gender' (interview with Majd, 22 March 2011)

²⁰ The institutionalisation of gender at the national level in Jordan started at the end of 1997, with the establishment of 'gender focal points' within ministries and public institutions. Refer to chapter two for a historical analysis of this.

and that people assigned to the gender focal points usually do not even know what gender means.²¹ She recalled how in 1995 a gender section had been established at the Ministry of Agriculture, but since it was not considered to be as important as other departments, it had quickly been closed down. This attitude on the government's side is also reflected in the way 'gender focal points' are created and integrated within ministries. In line with Jahan (1995), there are two possible models for the inclusion of gender policies in an institution: the first is the integrationist approach,²² and the second is the agenda-setting approach²³ (12–13). According to Majd, it is the first approach that is preferred at the national level. However, she was very disappointed about this strategy adopted by the government, because she felt that it was not the right one:

Although they [the government] created around 45 gender focal points... gender focal points came just at the end of the process. I mean, referring to the discussion of the national agenda, we were not involved at the beginning of the meetings. At the end of it, they just told us: now review the agenda from a gender perspective (Amman, 22 March 2011).

It is true that an integrationist approach is possibly the 'easiest way to achieve tangible gains in gender equality' (Larson, 2008: 10), but it leaves gender relations and socio-political norms unchallenged. Treating 'gender' as a component and adding a gendered lens only at the end of the policy process, as happened in the case of gender focal points in Jordan, will not interrogate the intersections between gender, race and ethnicity or the differences among women, leaving gender hierarchies unchallenged.

This attitude reflects the lack of political will on the part of the government to champion women's rights and gender issues. In March 2011 I participated in a

²¹ Majd's criticisms recall my analysis of the understanding and conceptualisation of gender and its mainstreaming among international and local organisations, discussed in chapter four.

²² According to Jahan (1995), the integrationist approach 'builds gender issues within existing development paradigms; the overall development agenda is not transformed but each issue is adapted to take into account women and gender concerns' (12–13).

²³ The agenda-setting approach 'implies transformation of the existing development agenda with a gender perspective [...]. It is not simply women as individuals, but a "women's agenda" that gets recognition from the mainstream' (Jahan, 1995: 13).

conference organised by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN),²⁴ and one of the debates addressed ‘how far gender mainstreaming has been promoted nationally’. The attending crowd, which was mainly comprised of women’s rights activists and NGO representatives, seemed to be very sceptical about it, denouncing the government’s lack of political will to pursue social change. Such political will is necessary for gender mainstreaming to achieve positive effects (Unmüßig, 2009), and especially for it to be transformative. In her analysis of national women’s machineries in Afghanistan, Larson (2008) argues that political will is an ‘essential component to the furthering of gender mainstreaming’ (61), although technical mechanisms or institutional contexts need to be considered as well.

The lack of political will is also reflected in the technical difficulties faced by the women I interviewed in both gender units, thanks to the lack of interest in investing resources in the promotion of gender justice. First they complained of a lack of human resources. The gender units at MoPIC and the MoSPD have no more than three employees each, and not all of these have a background in or good knowledge of gender issues, as Majd and Khulud told me. Second, they depend on external sources for financial support, receiving funding from international donors or national organisations. Third, their lack of a clear mandate is detrimental to the recognition of and support for their work at the national level. In November 2008, in partnership with the JNCW, the GSF organised a meeting for representatives from gender/women’s units, gender/women’s focal points and gender/women’s directorates working in some of the governmental organisations. They discovered that, at that time, only MoPIC had a clear mandate for the promotion of gender equality, and that the work in the other ministries related to gender mainstreaming was always led and supported by outside agencies (Suliman, 2010).

The combination of these three factors and the lack of internal credibility have pushed these gender units to the margins of decision-making processes at national and international levels in Jordan: they lack ‘resources, authority and expertise to achieve their objectives’ (Stienstra, 1994: 95).²⁵ The difficulties already facing collaboration between women’s organisations do not help to achieve any kind of integration

²⁴ <http://www.euromedrights.org/eng/> [accessed 8 March 2013].

²⁵ This is not only the case in Jordan. As described in chapter one many countries established women’s policy offices, particularly during the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985). However, the limited number of instruments and resources actually provided to these units made fulfilling their broad mandates incredibly difficult.

between the agendas of national machineries and those organisations' activities. Majd confirmed this during our discussion: 'In recent years we have been trying to ask organisations and civil society to try to put forward their awareness of gender issues, but organisations are not cooperating with each other, and it is difficult to work when there is no unified network' (Amman, 22 April 2011). As long as the reproduction of social hierarchies comes from institutions that are meant to work towards the promotion of women's rights, and as long as cooperation and trust between formal and informal organisations is weak, there is a risk that gender relations will remain unchallenged even within the main representatives of women's rights.

Given the multiplicity of actors involved in the representation of women in Jordan and the tensions within and between them, I ask whether and to what extent this disconnection and diversity are reflected in candidates' and MPs' relationships with state-driven and independent organisations. This analysis will conclude my discussion of the substantive representation of women in Jordan.

Tensions in the representation of gender interests

The female candidates I interviewed came from different social classes – mainly the middle and upper classes – diverse ethnic origins and very different educational and professional backgrounds: during my time in Jordan, I met community workers, lawyers, businesswomen, women activists, teachers and housewives. The intersections between ethnicity, national origin, religion, social class, occupation, and tribal background – which is closely linked to place of residence, thanks to the tribal structure of Jordanian society – gave rise to criticisms of the legitimacy of organisations' representation of gender interests and concerns.

The tensions and problems between organisations of which women activists complained are very similar to those pointed out by the female candidates who had sought support from particular organisations before the 2010 elections. Although several of the candidates I interviewed were extremely grateful for the support of local organisations, some of them were very critical. Ahlam was one of them. As she took me home after a conference with representatives of women's organisations, I looked at her young face, framed by the elegant hijab she always wears, and saw that she looked a little upset. I asked her whether anything was wrong, and she revealed

that she could not stand certain type of activism any more. I tried to ask her to be a little clearer, and she told me about her experience before the elections:

Before the election law was approved I went to the JNCW. They know me on both a personal and a professional level. They know that I am a strong woman and that I can speak up. I told them that I was going to be a candidate. I asked them for help and support. They invited me only to an opening session, not to be a participant in their activities. After that, they disappeared (Amman, 3 March 2011).

Ahlam had been expecting to receive a different kind of support from the JNCW, since she had also had some contact with them in the past. However, when I asked her why she had not wanted to seek support from other organisations, she quickly replied that she did not trust any of the women's organisations. For instance, she did not want to get support from the JWU because of their very politicised nature. As I listened to her I understood the political role the JNCW played among women in Jordan, especially before elections. Since the JNCW is a government-sponsored organisation, women like Ahlam want to get its support, as if its being government-related might improve their chances of winning the elections, a kind of government endorsement. This is particularly true for women who do not belong to big, powerful tribes, such as Ahlam, whose family still lives in Palestine. Since the support of the tribe is not consistent, some women turn to other state-related institutions.

While Ahlam's criticism and mistrust of the JNCW and women's organisations in general might be traced back to her origin as a Palestinian, for other women it was more a matter of social class and professional background, both of which were linked to the issue of elitism. This was the case with Dr Sabah, whom I presented in chapters three and four. Dr Sabah, an educated and plain-speaking candidate from Karak, was hoping to get some support from the JNCW, but this did not happen, and her discussion of this with me raised the problem of elite women:

Every woman in a good position in our community... and I am sorry to say this, but she just works for herself. The women running local organisations do not work for the women's 'movement'.

When you see women in these positions, they have been the same for 20 or 30 years. There are many good women in our community and they should take their chance. They do not listen to us. Not every change comes out of the struggles of women in Jordan. I did not have their support. I was expecting them to call me and encourage me. Why did the NDI call me? And why didn't any of them [local organisations] call me? They did not want to support me. In my opinion, they ought to have asked themselves: where is there a good woman? Let's support her. But they did not. They are jealous. I received a phone call from the JNCW only when they announced that I had won, but it was not the final result and I did not win in the end. They called me and congratulated me. But why didn't they call me before and ask if I needed any support? They want to be the first women in Jordan – but they are old, and they should hand over to the new generation (Amman, 18 January 2011).

Jealousy between women was also pointed out with reference to voting decisions, as previously discussed. However, I believe that Dr Sabah's account neatly addresses the issue of the position of the older generation of women activists as leaders. And like Ahlam, Dr Sabah relies on the support of the JNCW, yet being critical; but the criticisms are limited to the role of single persons. Ahlam's and Dr Sabah's accounts lead me to two different aspects. First, there is the problem of elitism in the leadership positions of the main women's organisations – although it has to be said that the whole country is dominated by a narrow elite, and that this phenomenon is not limited to women's organisations. Second, why does a governmental organisation such as the JNCW retain its credibility when the very legitimacy of the state is being called into question, as the recent uprisings show?

Most of the time the female candidates I interviewed were not complimentary about the efforts of the lone woman at the top of their local organisation: they were demanding generational change and better support for women who want to pursue a career in politics, with no discrimination on the basis of class or education. This is not only the case in Jordan: in her analysis of women's organisations in Lebanon, especially of organisations that outlive their founders, Joseph (1997: 58) stresses that leaders tend to stay in leadership positions for long periods (10–50 years), thereby

creating a close identification between the leader and the organisation. In line with Joseph's comment, a female candidate from Karak told me while drinking tea: 'There is a need for a new generation of women in those organisations. We need young people' (Amman, 23 January 2011). The words of the candidate recall Adnan's (1982) comment on Arab leaders in general: 'When they arrive in power they grow into their chairs, until they, body and chair, become inseparable' (Adnan, 1982: 76 in Joseph, 1997: 64). One activist from Irbid went beyond the generational discourse, complaining that the main women at the head of women's organisations do not trust women at the grassroots: 'Also, leaders of these organisations need to believe more in volunteering work and in women's role: they just work to get their position, their prestige' (Amman, 4 May 2011). This activist confirms Suad Joseph's argument (1997) that 'organisational achievements are closely linked to the class privileges, personal networks, and the specific skills of the leader' (58).

The charges of elitism raise questions about the ways in which gender interests are represented, given the multiplicity of actors involved. On 23 May 2011, I had the chance to participate in a meeting at the Senate organised by Senator Leila Sharaf²⁶ and MP Abla Abu Elbeh²⁷ with the representatives of the main women's organisations in Jordan. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a coordination committee, comprising members of the Senate and the House of Representatives and leaders of women's organisations, in order to work to identify legislative priorities for women. Senator Leila Sharaf opened the meeting, saying: 'There are too many issues that are important for women. And if we do not speak up for women, nobody is going to do it' (Amman, 23 May 2011). In her words, women's organisations and women in politics serve as the main representatives of women's rights in Jordan. However, most of the women in political office and at the head of women's organisations were considered by many of the female candidates I interviewed to have been 'hired by the government in order to show their faces at the international and regional level' (interview with female candidate, Amman, 18 February 2011). This lack of trust in the women who serve as representatives of women's rights reinforces the disconnection between organisations' agendas and women's gender interests at the grassroots.

²⁶ A Jordanian of Lebanese origin, Leila Sharaf is a Senator and former Minister of Information (1984–1985).

²⁷ Of Palestinian origin, Abla Abu Elbeh is a member of the Jordanian parliament, and is the First Secretary of the Jordanian Democratic People's Party.

In line with this critique, Toujan Faisal, the first female MP elected to Jordanian parliament, was very sceptical about the representative role of women's organisations. She told me:

Women's organisations are a sort of elite in Jordan. Only the Jordanian Women Union, which fought against the state, is active. The women's 'movement' is there, but it is more social and is not organised. The real 'movement' is integrated within the reforms and modernisation policies in Jordan (Amman, 7 June 2011).

Toujan sees the 'movement' as included in the process of democratisation, and as part of the social fabric. The reforms and modernisation policies she cites form part of the demands made during the recent street demonstrations, which started in early 2011. As outlined in chapter two, during the time I spent in Jordan, none of the main women's organisations participated in the Arab uprisings, except for the JWU. Direct participation in the street is an act of resistance to state power, and only independent organisations such as the JWU tried to mobilise people to demonstrate. This non-participation in demonstrations helped to widen the gaps that already existed among women's organisations, and between women's groups and women at the grassroots level. Similarly, Hanafi and Tabar (2005) point out that most of the NGOs in Palestine failed to take a leadership role in mobilising the grassroots for collective resistance, increasing the disconnection between NGOs and popular movements.

This disconnection leads me to my second point: how can a government-related organisation retain its credibility when the state's role and legitimacy are being questioned? I will attempt to answer to this question in relation to the JNCW, which serves as an umbrella organisation bringing different women's organisations together, and which was the organisation most often referred to during my interviews with female candidates. Its role as an 'umbrella organisation' emerged from my brief but helpful interview with Asma Khader in her office, who told me: 'The JNCW represents and coordinates the network of women's organisations and activists all around Jordan' (Amman, 28 November 2010). Her words seem to identify the women's 'movement' with one organisation that encompasses other women's organisations in Jordan; this excludes those organisations that are not members of the

JNCW, and raises questions about the legitimacy of the representation of gender interests.

The role of the JNCW was often criticised by my interviewees, because of its government relationships, and for establishing its goals and mission from a top-down perspective that is ‘carefully orchestrated from above’ (Brand, 1998: 124; Al-Atiyat, 2003; interviews with candidates, March – April 2011), without taking proper consideration of women’s needs at the grassroots. Its status as a governmental organisation adds to the impression that the JNCW is unable to sustain networks and collaborations among other organisations and groups. The activist from Irbid, who was a member of the JNFW, was pretty clear on this: ‘The JNCW should be the umbrella organisation, but it is weak. We, the JNFW, are the first partner of the JNCW. But they do not keep us informed of any changes or of their strategic plan’ (Amman, 4 May 2011).

Given that organisations such as the JNCW find their *raison d’être* in their links with the government, I would question the value of such organisations in the first place. But again, this type of organisation makes no claims to independence, being a technocratic think tank. The question may be whether some sets of conjunctures might facilitate cooperation between institutions like the JNCW and the more independent NGOs, thereby creating a massive pressure for legislative change.

Nevertheless, thanks to its state-sponsored structure, it seems to me that the JNCW is still regarded as the first port of call for female candidates who want the support of a women’s organisation. So why do some candidates, especially those with a higher level of education²⁸ and a strong professional background, turn to this organisation, while at the same time they are challenging the state’s actions?

In the current political situation of internal economic instability and regional uncertainty, as described in chapter two, the King and the government are constantly under the scrutiny of people in Jordan and across the region – now more than ever, in light of the crisis in neighbouring Syria. The legitimacy of the state has been questioned more than once in the last three years, especially when Friday demonstrations started to take place on other days of the week to call for economic reform and the ending of corruption. This situation has led to the appointment of five

²⁸ Those holding Masters or PhD degrees and in high-status occupational positions.

different prime ministers²⁹ since the end of 2010, and to new parliamentary elections in January 2013. Although changing the political figure at the top of an institution may give people a degree of hope, it is only through real economic and political reform that the country will actually benefit.

The female candidates I interviewed who were most critical of the government were also the most sceptical about state-sponsored women's organisations. So if women are challenging and questioning the very authority of the state, why do they still seek the support of state-related organisations? Although it is extremely difficult to fully grasp the real intentions of candidates running for elections, at first I saw this unchallenged reliance on the JNCW as hypocritical. However, as I analysed the hurdles that most of the women faced before the elections (described in chapters three and four), I realised that the JNCW might be the only space where they would be able to get the necessary support. This is particularly true for women with little support from their families or tribes. Even if they are very critical of the government and the role of the JNCW, their desire to get into parliament may be so strong as to outweigh their concerns about the source of the support that enables them to do so. The same may also be true of women who are easily co-opted by their tribes or communities, as they consider support from their tribe to be their only way into a position in politics. The question is whether and to what extent the women will advocate women's rights once elected – something that I have been questioning throughout this chapter. Finally, even though the 'femocrats' in state-sponsored institutions might represent the elite and be allied to the government, they might also be among the few people (together with independent groups as the JWU) who are trying to contest existing legislative arrangements, yet timidly, mainly because of their easy access to resources and networks.

I do not seek to justify an unchallenged dependence on sources of support that might co-opt female candidates' actions, whether those sources be political parties, tribes or state-related women's organisations. However, I would like to point out that, in a society rooted in patronage and clientelism, these forms of support might be a way for a woman to become part of public life, especially when a candidate does not

²⁹ The last three appointed were Awn Shawkat Al-Khasawneh, Fayez al-Tarawneh and Abdullah Ensour. Jordanian prime ministers have always been royal appointees, but after the 2013 elections the new prime minister and government contributed to the nomination, following extensive consultations between the palace and the newly elected parliament (Ryan, 2013).

seek and/or does not want the support of an independent yet highly politicised organisation such as the JWU. Not all of the female candidates I interviewed questioned this opportunistic approach – an approach often taken in the game of politics, in which people try to maximise their options. A few of them were hoping that, although they were prepared to bargain with state co-option during the elections (i.e. by seeking the support of the JNCW), this would not continue once they had gained entry into parliament. However, as the development of women's organisations has demonstrated, it is very difficult for those on the inside to advocate change without becoming instrumentalised by the state structure. In this regard, we need to bear in mind that there are also some women who refuse any connection with state-sponsored organisations, and that there are fully independent bodies such as the JWU and the AWO.

The tensions among and between female candidates, MPs and women's organisations are complicated, nuanced and multifaceted. These problematic relations certainly have consequences for the promotion of gender justice and for the future for women's rights in Jordan.

Conclusions

I am not pessimistic, I am realistic: if things will continue to work in this way, the status of women's rights in the country won't get any better (interview with JWU activist, London, 7 March 2013).

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, multiple actors constitute the substantive representation of women. However, the different relationships within and between female candidates, female MPs, women's organisations and national machineries reflect the tensions within and among all of these groups. Through the analysis of the experiences of female candidates and MPs, I have been able to describe the negotiations they make in order to pursue their campaigns (in the case of candidates) and work in parliament (in the case of MPs). Through these experiences I have shown how each story helps to create what Rai (2012) describes as the 'complex picture of gender politics' (209). The intersections between class, education, tribal support, professional background, national origin, ethnicity, religion and location influence the political agendas of each candidate and MP, together with their

involvement with women's organisations or groups. When candidates and MPs are involved with women's groups, it is more likely that they will become aware of issues concerning women's rights that have a national impact.

The representation of gender interests reveals a very complicated picture, and the interests involved are multifaceted. In the current situation in Jordan, gender interests may continue to be defined from a top-down perspective by an elitist group of women who can be easily co-opted, not only by the government and the royal family, but also by the international community. With the exception of independent groups such as the JWU, the older generation of women who represent the official organisations for women's rights risk becoming disconnected from the interests of women at the grassroots. Although their position is extremely complicated in regard to their relationships with their own tribes, communities or parties, female candidates might be more connected to the needs of women at the grassroots.

The disconnection between different actors and the multiplicity of women's organisations reflect the plurality of women in the country, raising questions about the representativeness of gender interests. Given that women (like men) do not constitute a homogeneous group, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for women's organisations, female candidates and MPs to represent and speak up for all women in Jordan. Moreover, only independent organisations such as the JWU seem to be more willing to explicitly challenge gender inequality – but their work is often limited by the strict control of the state.

The lack of political will to create better cooperation among women's organisations and develop the role and impact of national machineries for the promotion of gender justice might therefore reinforce the existing disconnections within civil society in Jordan. Elitism, foreign funding and close relationships with the state are the main causes of these disconnections. However, I argue that as long as the intersections of gender, class, tribe, ethnicity, religion, education and professional background are not taken into consideration in the various organisations' agendas, and as long as women are treated as a homogeneous group, the constitutive representation of gender will result in the reproduction of social hierarchies.

When government interests are promoted in tandem with personal ones, the risk of a backlash against women's rights is high. Women's rights are a fundamental aspect of democratisation. But as long as the promotion of women's rights is associated with government- and royal-sponsored organisations in a context where the role of state is

becoming increasingly discredited and challenged, there is a danger that attempts to promote women's rights will not lead to transformative social change, as I will further problematise in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The current political situation: what future for women's rights?

As a human being I always have hope. But I am not optimistic right now. What is happening in the region is affecting us. And women's rights, as always, are relegated to the back seat. [...] The situation is stagnant. In a context where the economy is not doing so well, corruption is still spreading, and refugees from Syria are increasing day by day... women's rights are not a priority right now. We are moving backward, not forward. [...] In addition to the stagnation that we are experiencing, there are feelings of apathy and indifference among people in Jordan. And I feel it among my students as well. This critical political and economic situation is not helping us to see a brighter future... stagnation, apathy and indifference, what a deadly mixture (Professor Rula Quawas, Skype interview, 2 April 2013).

I interviewed Professor Rula Quawas a year and a half after I left Jordan. During the interview we naturally talked about her experience at the University of Jordan: as described in chapter two, she had been dismissed from her post because she had assisted a group of students in her feminist theory class to make a short video about the sexual harassment experienced by female students on campus, an episode on which I will reflect later in this conclusion. But what left me puzzled and frustrated during our conversation was her idea of 'stagnancy'. While I was in Jordan, interviewees with whom I discussed the uprisings in the region usually reacted with an attitude of 'let's wait and see what happens.' Of course my interviewees did not represent the entire population of Jordan, but the comments I heard in regard to the situation in the region were striking. I detected an air of waiting, an expectation of action by the government or royal family. As discussed in chapter two, every time I engaged in such discussions my respondents would remind me that 'Jordan will not end up with a regime change like in Egypt or Tunisia... because we are different.'¹

¹ Field notes, Amman, May 2011.

During the last two years, however, something has changed in Jordan, albeit with less intensity than in other countries in the region. As Adely (2012b) recently argued with reference to the November 2012 uprisings, change is ‘an inevitable product of the constant power/resistance dialectic that characterises the politics of everyday life, is a constant in social life, even if it does not count as a “something” in policy debates in the United States’. Since Jordanian politics is connected to royal patronage, clientelism and strong tribal ties, and since the situation of refugees, whether of Palestinian, Iraqi or Syrian origin, is having an impact on Jordan’s demographic, political and social balance, it is very difficult if not impossible to compare the continuum of uprisings in Jordan with those elsewhere in the region.

Change in Jordan may not come about through an overthrow of royal patronage, but it may occur through political and economic reform. During the last parliamentary elections (January 2013), the government established an Independent Electoral Commission (IED), which was in charge of administering the electoral process. Moreover, in response to some of the requests from civil society and people in the streets, a national list was adopted, and this increased the participation of political parties in the electoral process. Although the work of the IED and the introduction of party lists have been criticised by civil society actors (RASED, 2013: 2), they have nevertheless been recognised as attempts by the government to improve the very precarious political situation. Clearly, the modification of electoral law alone will not be enough to improve Jordan’s socio-politico-economic situation, but it is to be hoped that a small change might lead to more vigorous reforms in the future.

However, although I am trying to be optimistic and to remain aware of the peculiar context I am analysing, I do feel, as Professor Quawas put it, that the current situation in Jordan is stagnant. The euphoria experienced at the beginning of the demonstrations back in 2011 is in danger of decreasing day by day, as unemployment rates soar,² proper political reforms fail to materialise, and opposition to the government seems weak.

At the moment, the oppositional forces standing against the government’s actions are few. One of the first of these forces, called the ‘alternative opposition’ (Ryan, 2011), appears to have lost the ground it gained at the beginning of the

² In the first three months of 2013, percentage of the population of Jordan that is unemployed increased to 12.8%, up from 11.4% in the same period in 2012, according to the Department of Statistics. Male unemployment stands at 11.1%, compared to 20.5% for women (Derhally, 2013).

demonstrations in 2011. With specific reference to women's rights advocates, as described in chapters two, three and five, a few independent women's organisations seem to be taking up the challenge and cause of women's rights, but their room for manoeuvre is still severely limited by the state.

Apart from the main women's organisations, during 2012 some independent groups of activists, comprising mostly young men and women, tried to openly address violence against women in Jordan. There has been an escalation of violence against women in the region generally (Kandiyoti, 2013), and it is a widespread problem in Jordan too, not only in terms of domestic violence and honour crimes, but also in regard to sexual harassment. In June 2012 a diverse range of protesters, organised by four groups of activists, took to the streets of Amman to peacefully demonstrate for gender justice, creating a 'human chain'.³ They were particularly contesting the rape-marriage law (which allows rape charges to be dropped if the perpetrator agrees to marry the victim⁴), the state of women's citizenship rights, honour crimes, and the harassment of women. That protest provoked mixed and sometimes angry comments, particularly from those who considered the demonstration to have undermined Islamic precepts (Abu Hamid, 2012). Nevertheless, it indicated the extent to which the younger generation is starting to challenge gender norms and inequalities, against the background of popular uprisings and events in Jordan and throughout the region. Most importantly, they are very conscious that women's and gender issues are not marginal but central to transforming the socio-politico-cultural climate of Jordanian society.

As the controversy over this protest revealed, the small number of other opposition forces that are resisting co-option by the state appear to be Islamist political parties, particularly the Islamic Action Front, which is the main party of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the Islamic Action Front does not have any representatives in parliament, having boycotted the elections in 2010 and 2013, it seems to be the most organised and powerful oppositional force, as its capacity for mobilising on the streets during the last two years of demonstrations after Friday prayers suggests (Guarnieri, 2012). Professor Quawas confirmed this during our interview: 'They [the Islamic

³ The first of the four groups is called 'No Honour in Crime', and is a campaign to bring honour crimes into public discourse. The second, 'My Mother is Jordanian', addresses the discriminatory Nationality Law. The third group, 'Mush Shatara', aims to decrease the incidence of sexual harassment on the streets of Jordan. 'The Crime of 308' is the fourth group of volunteers, who are trying to repeal Law 308 of the Jordanian Penal Code (Atalla, 2013).

⁴ Article 308 of the Jordanian Penal Code.

Action Front] are the only organised opposition. You can see the orchestration of their system – but they are against everything. We cannot underestimate their power, which seems to be latent... but it's actually there' (Skype interview, 2 April 2013).

The Islamic Action Front has female followers, but their positions on gender justice are often very conservative. Although the role of the Islamic Action Front does not appear to be as overt as in other countries in the region, its power seems to be a latent presence. For how long will they remain silent? Only time will tell, but it is clear that the rise of Islamists in the region, such as in Egypt, demands more research and analysis, particularly in relation to the promotion of women's rights, including in Jordan.

Thus in this 'stagnant' context, to use Professor Quawas's word, we may be witnessing a paradox. On the one hand, the state instrumentalises women's rights as a democratic façade, either through ad hoc women's organisations or through the introduction of 'soft-option' (Kandiyoti, 2011) measures such as gender quotas. On the other hand, the opposition movements have gender regressive platforms. In this context, demands for women's rights risk being sidelined once again.

The 'burden' of promoting women's rights therefore inevitably comes back to women's rights activists and women's organisations, both in Jordan and in the region. As I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, each organisation in Jordan has its own agenda, was created with different goals, and gets its support from diverse institutions, organisations and people. However, given the high risk that the privileging of economic and political agendas will leave women's rights at the margins of policymaking, there might be an urgent need to question the premises of gender equality and women's empowerment, not only among national and international practitioners, but also among women's groups, women's rights activists and women in politics in Jordan.

In the following sections I will clearly state the contributions I aim to make with this thesis. I will also discuss the notion of gender equality, and the significance of feminist research in light of my analysis.

The politics of gender equality: between intersectionality and social change

Throughout the thesis I have been trying to explore the idea of the politics of social change, focusing not only on the 'Arab uprisings' but also addressing the wider

continuum of social change – which, as described in chapters one and two, did not just begin in 2011. Since my specific angle on this research was to analyse the gender dimension of social change in democratisation processes, I have been interested in the attempts to engineer social change from the outside. The premise behind the rhetoric of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment is linked to the achievement of gender equality. But in light of my analysis, what does gender equality actually mean in the context of women's political participation in Jordan? And how can we move forwards?

As previously discussed, I place the individual's ability to make strategic life choices at the core of empowerment (Kabeer, 2005). Therefore, in an ideal world, gender equality will imply that individuals can freely choose how to live their own lives, and there will be no discrimination on the basis of gender, class, race, religion, sexuality or other such factors. However, when we refer to real life and to a specific socio-politico-historical context, the picture becomes extremely complicated and nuanced.

Indeed, it is precisely around the notion of gender equality that my thesis makes its first contribution. Specifically, I have attempted to widen the debate on gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment and gender quotas by focusing on an often-neglected case study in the Middle East, i.e. Jordan, hoping to offer some new reflections on the promotion of women's rights in that country. Gender mainstreaming is often analysed in relation to post-conflict or conflict situations and related to gender-based violence, particularly with reference to the Middle East, as discussed in the introduction. Jordan, being a 'buffer state' (Bustani, 2012), is not directly involved in any conflict situations; however, my research shows that the instrumentalisation of women's rights and gender justice is not limited to conflict or post-conflict contexts.

As has emerged from my analysis in relation to Jordan, there may be two major factors that shape and constrain efforts to mainstream gender and empower women in global and local policymaking: the gap between feminist theory and institutional practice, and the conflict between feminist concepts and values and the broader ideological framework of neoliberal economics. Practitioners in the field often understand gender equality in two different yet connected ways – that is, with a technocratic and/or a legalistic approach. Western multilateral institutions, and also some local organisations, often believe that mainstreaming gender means adding

women's projects to their dossier, even though those projects can actually marginalise women by creating or sustaining unequal gendered power relations. Moreover, many (though not all) people working in the field often have only a superficial understanding of what gender means, and they use it simply as a key term to please donors, without engaging with its practical implications. Thus in the language of the promotion of women's rights, the words 'gender', 'equality' and 'empowerment' risk becoming no more than buzzwords to satisfy the requirements of international donors, in a sort of box-ticking approach. As long as gender equality and women's empowerment are reduced to technocratic and very formalistic language, they will not necessarily lead to social transformation.

An exclusively legalistic approach to empowerment and gender equality might also be problematic. The gap between existing legislation and how laws are actually implemented is a widespread problem, not only in Jordan, but everywhere in the world. In the context of Jordan we have witnessed some 'highlights', such as the introduction of gender quotas analysed in chapter three; but as I have been arguing throughout the thesis, merely 'adding women' to politics does not necessarily mean that women are empowered. Although many of the agendas behind women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming projects, such as those analysed in chapters four and five, find their roots in a technocratic, legalistic and rights-based understanding of gender equality, in order to achieve full equality in a meaningful and genuine sense, equality under the law is not sufficient. I certainly think it is necessary, but it is not enough. Achieving formal equality per se, which simply involves 'adding women' to specific policies, programmes or policies, is not an adequate response to gender-based discrimination.

If we wish to understand and address the institutionalised nature of women's disadvantage, tackling socio-political and cultural systems may be a way to switch from a formalistic understating of gender equality to a more substantial and transformative one. In this way gender equality will not seek its roots or *raison d'être* only in the rights-based approach, but will directly or indirectly help to address and challenge gender relations and norms. As long as a person has the opportunity and ability to choose, they will establish what gender equality means for themselves. We may therefore need to politicise gender equality in order to develop a framework that looks at people's diverse interests, bearing in mind the differential impact not only of

gender but also of ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion and all markers of power relations specific to a particular context.

This reflection leads me to the thesis's second contribution: by bringing the experiences and accounts of women into my analysis, I have methodologically added a new perspective to discussions of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. Addressing female candidates' experiences and women's rights activists' accounts might bring a different feminist viewpoint to the debate. As explained in chapter four, candidates' participation in political training is a complex phenomenon: it can be done as a matter of prestige or to build a wider network; it might be an opportunity to receive support not found elsewhere (i.e. from the tribe, or from some local women's organisations); or it might be done out of a genuine interest in increasing one's skills and finding ways to challenge gender discrimination. However, as long as local and international practitioners do not take participants' interests into consideration, the transformative potential of empowerment and gender mainstreaming projects may get lost. If we start from the interests of those involved in particular programmes, projects or policies, such as in the programme to increase leadership skills among women in politics, we might be able to move from an ethnocentric and westernised notion of gender equality to a more nuanced, complex and interest-related understanding. Although this might work in theory, it will be challenging for women's rights activists to translate it into practice – yet not impossible. We also need to bear in mind that, as particularly discussed in chapters four and five, women's organisations in Jordan constitute a diverse and complex category, and that the representation of gender interests among women in politics is very complicated and nuanced as well. Indeed, as long as gender interests continue to be defined from a top-down perspective, the risk that they will be instrumentalised is high. Employing a bottom-up approach, not only within the politics of the organisations, but also in the study of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment – as I have done by bringing women's experiences back into the analysis – will hopefully help to bridge the gap between feminist knowledge and the promotion of gender equality.

Therefore I argue that attempts at gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment from above will not change institutional practices and norms unless they are supported by social movement activism on gender equality, and are subjected to the ongoing critical scrutiny of feminist scholars and activists. Even if

mainstreaming efforts are hypothetically pushing towards social change, they face entrenched resistance in most national and global economic policymaking bodies, in which the gender-neutral, neoliberal, rational and male-dominated economic framework has been institutionalised, as in the cases of the IRI, the NDI and some local (government-related) organisations. In such contexts, feminist intentions and objectives might easily become marginalised and instrumentalised. It will only be through collaboration in local, national, regional and transnational contexts that feminist knowledge will curb the instrumentalisation of gender equality rhetoric. This picture becomes even more complicated if we bear in mind that there are just a few independent activists and organisations in Jordan; those with the most authority are government-supported or under royal patronage, which raises justifiable doubts about the premises of their promotion of gender equality in the first place.

Changing the current understanding of gender equality may require radical and difficult interventions. As Charlesworth (2005) has suggested:

Such a change would require a redefinition of the strategy of gender mainstreaming so that its focus is on the complexity of gender relations in specific contexts. It must mean more than allowing women into international institutions; it must require transforming the structures and assumptions of the international order. It would involve working to change men's behaviour as much as women's (18).

Indeed, as Charlesworth argues, it is not exclusively a matter of (not) treating gender as a synonymous with women – focusing on the biological differences between men and women – and of the risk that gender mainstreaming will become women's mainstreaming. More importantly, it is a matter of adopting a more holistic, nuanced and less cosmetic approach, even if we focus on women alone.

This leads to the third contribution I have made with my thesis, which is particularly related to the analysis of gender quotas. As stated in chapter one, challenging gender inequalities and injustices is a prerequisite for a society that respects human rights and democracy. In the case of Jordan, as outlined from chapter two onwards, addressing the promotion of women's rights does not seem to be a form of politics favoured by the regime, which prefers to 'keep the façade clean' before

regional and international eyes through the promotion of women's political participation. The introduction of gender quotas in Jordan may have rapidly increased the participation of women in politics, but it has left out of the political agenda other more important issues that would improve women's rights, such as a revision of laws against honour crimes, a discussion of the Nationality Law, and a reform of the Personal Status Law.

Although some scholars have previously addressed gender quotas in the municipal elections in Jordan (David and Nanes, 2011), I have paid particular attention to gender quotas in parliamentary elections and to the methodology employed in the analysis of quotas. As described in chapter three, much of the literature on gender quotas revolves around positions for or against the adoption of quotas. Throughout the thesis I have revealed the extent to which the importance of the specific sociocultural and political context, together with the actors involved in the introduction of such a measure, needs to be taken into account in the analysis. In chapter three I demonstrated that a deeper analysis of the context and material conditions of quotas is necessary, as is an analysis of the intersections of candidates' diverse markers of identity, in order to understand how governmental, international and tribal-social interests might instrumentalise the introduction and use of quotas. The intersections between diverse actors, different interests and multiple socio-political and economic factors are fundamental to the analysis of the adoption of policies that address women's rights; being for or against the introduction of quotas is not enough.

As long as gender quotas are treated as a technocratic and cosmetic tool that will not challenge the status quo, the transformative agenda of gender equality may be lost once again. Since the concepts of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are often used as no more than technical, formalistic and bureaucratic tools – as the adoption of gender quotas has revealed – it may be worth rethinking the methodology to turn gender equality into a transformative project.

First, a transformational agenda needs to look at wider issues in terms of legal rights, access to resources, and social and cultural attitudes, as my analysis of quotas has demonstrated. Second, I strongly believe that there should be greater focus on and involvement of men in challenges to gender inequality. Women's political participation is not exclusively a women's issue, but also involves their male counterparts. For instance, it requires an analysis of how gender relations in a specific context influence a candidate's decision to run for parliament. Focusing more on

men's experiences at the level of analysis and research, as well as having more men involved in empowerment projects and activities, will help to turn women's political participation into a gender issue. Third, while a gender lens will be necessary in this analysis, an intersectional approach is also essential.

This reflection leads me to the last but not least important contribution of my thesis. My research contributes to feminist scholarship that not only stresses the importance of looking at a particular context, but also seeks ways to link the particular to broader issues, be the promotion of gender equality, neoliberal policies, women's empowerment or the representation of women.

As I discussed in the introduction, the private and public necessarily come into play in the analysis of women's political participation. However, the focus should shift from what constitutes the private and public to an understanding of the intersections and complexities of the everyday lives of women (or men) who want to pursue a career in politics in the private and public spheres. How do religion, party affiliation, place of residence, tribal relations and so on help to shape a woman (or man's) identity in the specific context of their participation in politics? More importantly, how does the political economy of the context in which the person lives influence their social position?

Intersectionality has been a multifaceted lens of analysis. It has not only revealed the complex and nuanced shaping of personal identity, but has also reflected the extent to which different political platforms within diverse contexts of gender interests representation intersect. Globalisation, neoliberalism and gender equality regimes have doubtless influenced the adoption of gender quotas in Jordan as well as candidates' more intimate decisions to run for parliament.

In the context of gender equality rhetoric, international and local organisations often treat 'women' as a homogeneous category, without considering differences with respect to social class, place of residence, tribal affiliation and so on. Intersectionality, or the lack thereof, also emerges in the articulation of a particular type of politics among women's groups and women's rights activists, especially given the speed with which politics is moving, both in Jordan and in the region. Political platforms are themselves intersectional. Being a women's rights' activist who is sponsored by the royal family or supported by the government, or being a female candidate who accepts support from international institutions with neoliberal agendas, may prove to be problematic as well. Indeed, activism that is not oppositional to the regime, and

women's rights activism that is uncritical of neoliberal agendas and neocolonial encroachment, may follow the same gender equality rhetoric as is promoted internationally.

In a country where, on the one hand, there is an eagerness to appear 'modern' or 'good' (as the introduction of quotas demonstrates), while on the other hand there is not much effort to challenge gender inequalities (as the laws regulating violence against women and citizenship rights reveal), the role of women's organisations and women's rights activist is now more central than ever. Yet with the exception of a few independent groups, the main women's organisations – which often do not adopt an intersectional approach – are walking a tightrope between government co-optation and the promotion of women's rights. As long as the promotion of women's rights is associated with the government and with organisations operating under royal patronage, in a context where the role of state is becoming increasingly discredited and challenged, there is a danger that this will eventually produce an even greater backlash against the promotion of women's rights' in Jordan than has already occurred in Egypt.

For these reasons, local and international organisations, as well as individual women's rights activists, might employ a more nuanced methodology in the promotion of women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming. By starting to pay attention to gender interests, and by addressing the intersections of different contexts, they might be able to understand and practise gender equality in substantive terms. I think that field practitioners, whether international or local, should try to better understand and critically engage with the notions of gender and empowerment in order to grasp all the implications of those concepts for the projects they organise. As I have demonstrated, an insufficient understanding of both the transformative potential of empowerment and the concept of gender will lead to the failure of such policies, prioritising neoliberal practices instead of caring about women's gender interests and expectations. Therefore workshops and discussions led by academics – and, at best, by activists too – will help to provide in-depth knowledge of such concepts. Exchanges and discussions between practitioners, activists, academics and donors could potentially help to create a critical and *intersectional* engagement with concepts such empowerment and gender, together with their transformative aspect, for all those involved in women's empowerment projects. In this way gender equality will ideally regain its transformative meaning, as well as leading to social change.

Reflections on feminist approaches and future research

As has emerged from my approach to the analysis, I have been trying to contribute to questions of gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment and the representation of gender interests, not only on a theoretical level, but by attempting to connect theory and practice. As I stated in the introduction, I think of my research as feminist. According to Millen (1997), research may be considered feminist if it incorporates two main aims:

[...] a sensitivity on the role of gender within society and the differential experiences of males and females and a critical approach to the tools of research on society, the structures of methodology and epistemology within which 'knowledge' is placed within the public domain (6.3).

In line with Millen's first point, throughout the thesis I have attempted to bring the experiences of female candidates and women's rights activists into the analysis. Studying women is not a new phenomenon (Harding, 1987: 8); but studying them from the perspective of their own experiences, making women's lives visible, may help us not to 'reaffirm the dominant ideologies about women and their place in world' (Letherby, 2003: 74). Advocating a research-for-women approach might be interpreted as insisting that research should be about women only, but this is not the case. Indeed, as Morgan (1981) argues, 'taking gender seriously' means bringing men back in. Morgan (1981) also stresses that if we accept that 'man is not the norm nor woman the deviation, we need to consider the social construction of femininity and masculinity' (39).

It is true that in my research I focused extensively on the experiences of female candidates and women's rights activists in Jordan. However, starting from their experiences, I attempted to understand how they construct and shape their own position within their society, community, tribe or family. The men I interviewed worked for international and (in some cases) local organisations, or at government level. I decided to focus exclusively on female candidates because of the lack of anthropological research on their experiences; as stated previously, I aimed to

contribute to debates on gender mainstreaming and democratisation from a bottom-up perspective, bringing women's experiences in.

However, this was not the only reason for my focus on women. Indeed, when I interviewed some male representatives of political parties and former male candidates, I encountered some challenges. When I spoke to one of them on the phone to schedule an interview, I sensed that he was trying to flirt with me. Feeling somewhat uncomfortable after the phone call, I decided to ask my interpreter and friend Ahlam to come with me to the meeting. She did so. The impression I had gained on the phone was confirmed during the interview, as the interviewee asked whether I was married, invited us out for dinner, and did not reply properly to my questions. I decided to end the interview after ten minutes. In the car, Ahlam seemed very disappointed too, and she told me: 'Just forget about him, Arab men are not like that' (Amman, 12 June 2011). To be sure, this was an isolated episode, and I met very nice and kind men throughout my stay in Jordan. But as I wrote in my field notes, interviewing men was extremely challenging:

By now I have interviewed five men involved in politics (within political parties, working at the government or in parliament).

Interviewing men has proved to be more difficult than I thought, and a bit useless. To me, it looks like they don't want to say too much, as they don't trust me. Unlike women, they don't digress, they try to go straight to the point they want to make. However, I often had the feeling they were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. I don't think they were completely honest: I expected this, but I think it was worth a try! (Field notes, Amman, June 2011).

By interviewing men I aimed to gather different perspectives on life in politics, and particularly on women's participation in the political arena. Reflecting on this after the fieldwork, I realised that I had chosen the wrong methodology: the questions I had asked about women's political participation had been too direct. A less direct and more nuanced approach would have probably given me different answers. Future research on women's political participation, in particular with reference to Jordan, should certainly take men's experiences more explicitly into consideration. However,

I also think that, since I have been addressing an understudied issue in Jordan, a close focus on women's experiences was necessary in order to tackle the topic in question.

The second point in my quote from Millen on feminist research refers to the methodology and approach employed in the analysis, which for me has been central to a critical engagement with the phenomenon of 'gendering democratisation' in Jordan. Gender and intersectionality are lenses through which we see and understand the world around us, connecting the dynamics of everyday life to wider contexts. They are lenses through which we can better understand feminist knowledge, and through which we can also contribute to feminist practice. It is by linking modes of thought to actual lived experiences that I can see how feminist knowledge connects with practice.

During the past four years I have been shaping my own positionality as researcher in relation to my family, colleagues and respondents. As I am a first-generation scholar in my family and come from an 'ungendered' international law background, this research has been challenging on a personal and professional level: it was difficult not only to build my own critical thinking amid my family and friends, but also to find ways to make my research useful in practice. To what extent will my research contribute to social change among women's rights activists and female candidates in Jordan? This question has been on my mind constantly, both during and after fieldwork.

I am aware that I cannot change the gender equality system all at once through my research. In any case, this is not my aim. Most importantly, throughout the thesis my aim has been neither to judge female candidates, women's rights activists, international and local practitioners and their work, nor to pretend to have the 'right' answers to questions of women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming. My aim has been to critically engage with the phenomenon of women's political participation, offering (hopefully) new perspectives, which will need further exploration and analysis.

To be sure, one of my goals has been to raise awareness among my interviewees, people who are interested in the topic, practitioners in the field and people around me, including my family and colleagues. In particular I hope that my thesis will become a 'space' for women's rights activists and female candidates in Jordan to reflect on and think through their experiences from a different angle.

Most importantly, my main purpose throughout this research has been to try to bridge the notorious gap between feminist knowledge and practice. As I described in chapter four, after receiving feedback from female candidates who had participated in activities organised by the NDI, I tried to report that feedback to NDI practitioners. As that anecdote demonstrated, we all have different perceptions of reality, different roles in society and different politics behind our thoughts. However, when I met the practitioner at the NDI and we discussed my preliminary findings, I soon realised that through this type of dialogue and confrontation my research might indeed contribute to some sort of change. Debates and discussions among the diverse actors involved in the promotion of women's empowerment would guarantee a more genuine consideration of the diverse interests involved. In order to continue in this direction, I intend to disseminate my findings not only to academic forums, but also among women's rights activists in Jordan, and to the female candidates I interviewed. Furthermore, I hope that through transnational networks I will be able to disseminate my research not only to my own network in Jordan, but also more broadly in the region and transnationally.

Transnational feminism(s) is/are shaping the politics of many civil societies and women's organisations and women's rights activists around the world, as the story of Professor Quawas confirms. When I interviewed her in April 2013, I asked her whether, after being dismissed from her post, she had received any type of support from women's rights activists in Jordan. She told me:

Princess Basma publicly stood up for me during a conference. But she was the only one. Asma Khader, of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, called me, and that's it. But you know... I received so much support from transnational and international networks, something that I did not expect at all (Skype interview, 2 April 2013).

Professor Quawas's story confirms the complex picture of the diverse agendas and interests (royal, governmental, political or social) behind women's activism(s) in Jordan. Her account also confirmed my doubts about the timid approach to the promotion of women's rights and gender issues in Jordan. Although she has now returned to teaching her feminist theory class, during the events in question Professor

Quawas had a hard time. She has been very thankful for the support she has received from transnational feminist networks. Certainly it would have been more effective to have a strong local mobilisation, which did not happen. Yet the effectiveness of transnational networks in challenging her dismissal, and the relationship between transnational and local mobilisation, will certainly require further analysis, with reference both to this episode and to the promotion of women's rights in Jordan more generally; this will open space for future research.

Although further study is needed, I think that it will be through these transnational feminist networks that we researchers may be able to bridge the gap between feminist knowledge and practice. In the years to come I think that the challenge for us as feminist researchers will be to continue to build on scholarship that is globally informed, locally grounded and intersectional. Most importantly, we may need to think of scholarship that, while crossing borders, does not neglect the importance of context for the analysis of the development of activism(s) and/or feminism(s) in different locations. We decide where to draw the lines and boundaries of our research. We are able to trace a general map on which to address universal patterns in how gender inequalities are constructed, shaped and reproduced in different, specific socio-politico-historical contexts, which might be local, regional, international or transnational. It is only through shared yet diverse accounts of gender discrimination that cross-border feminist scholarship will be able to emerge.

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